Robert Deliège

The World of the 'Untouchables'

Paraiyars of Tamil Nadu

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Translated by
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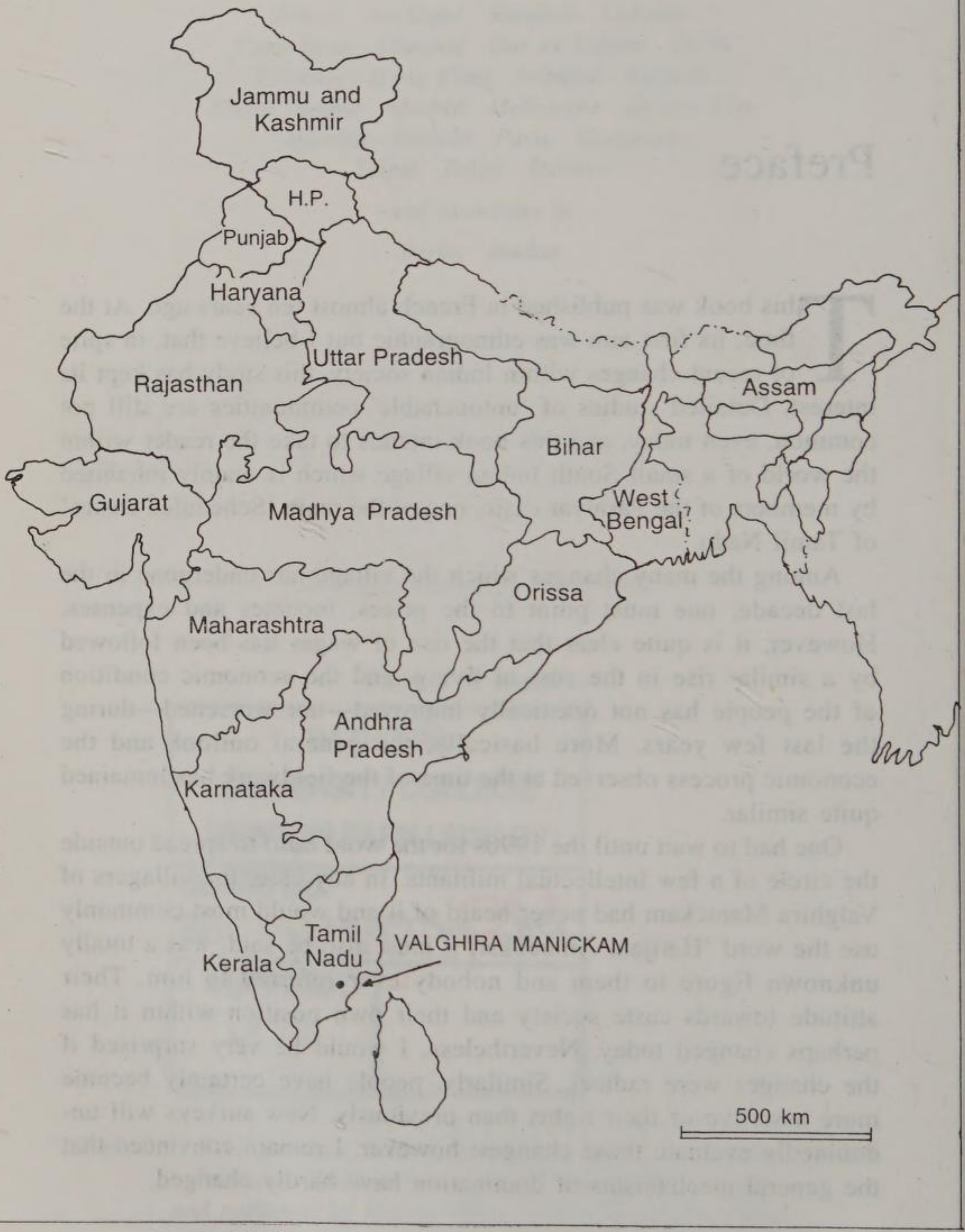
DELHI
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
CALCUTTA CHENNAI MUMBAI
1997

Preface

This book was published in French almost ten years ago. At the time, its first aim was ethnographic but I believe that, in spite of recent changes within Indian society, this study has kept its interest. Detailed studies of 'untouchable' communities are still not common, even today, and this book intends to take the reader within the world of a small South Indian village which is mainly inhabited by members of the Paraiyar caste, one of the main 'Scheduled castes' of Tamil Nadu.

Among the many changes which the village has undergone in the last decade, one must point to the prices, incomes and expenses. However, it is quite clear that the rise of wages has been followed by a similar rise in the cost of living, and the economic condition of the people has not drastically improved—nor worsened—during the last few years. More basically, the general outlook and the economic process observed at the time of the fieldwork has remained quite similar.

One had to wait until the 1990s for the word *dalit* to spread outside the circle of a few intellectual militants. In any case, the villagers of Valghira Manickam had never heard of it and would most commonly use the word 'Harijan. Ambedkar, it must also be said, was a totally unknown figure to them and nobody ever referred to him. Their attitude towards caste society and their own position within it has perhaps changed today. Nevertheless, I would be very surprised if the changes were radical. Similarly, people have certainly become more assertive of their rights than previously. New surveys will undoubtedly evaluate those changes; however, I remain convinced that the general mechanisms of domination have hardly changed.



A map of India showing the location of Valghira Manickam

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Introduction

The anthropologist makes the dream of all travellers come true. He settles himself for months or even years in the midst of a population and observes with precision the multiple aspects of their daily life, enters into family privacy and tries to discover not only the institutions but also the ways of thinking and the beliefs of the villagers. This book is the fruit of such a field study. Its first aim is to give an account as exhaustively as possible of a little village in South India.

There are certain material constraints which make it difficult to operate a preliminary selection of an area for study. It is often necessary to wait to be in the country in order to choose a region, select a village and limit oneself to a given community. Thus it is not unusual for an anthropologist to be led, by the chance accidents and constraints arising during his search, to end up by studying a quite different community from that which he had originally dreamed about. His initial hypotheses are thus reduced to nothing. He has to let himself be guided by this new community in order to formulate other hypotheses. This is particularly the case in India where, in the space of only a few miles, one can pass from an almost capitalist caste of traders to a community of orthodox Brahmans with illiterate untouchables or peasants with a warrior look in between. The final choice of the village can depend on such unacademic criteria as the presence, or absence, of a well of drinkable water or on the friendly relations which have been made in the region. Some have regretted that fieldwork has become an end in itself in social anthropology, but on the other hand, there can be no social anthropology without fieldwork and this explains why the anthropologist can easily accept abandoning his initial projects in order to study a society the very existence of which he perhaps may have been unaware of.

It was only a few days before the beginning of my study that I was able to fix my choice on the village of Valghira Manickam. I thus had only a minimum of preconceived notions concerning the Paraiyars and my initial goal was to collect as much material as possible. It would be false to claim that I knew nothing about the untouchables. In fact, I had read a rather abundant amount of literature which allowed me to have a pretty precise idea about the *Harijans,* as they were called in modern India. The lack of monographs on them had even guided my choice. The Harijans had usually been dealt with from outside and rarely from inside their own society.

A few years earlier, however, Moffatt (1979) had published a study which constituted an important advance in understanding untouchability. The village which served as a basis for Moffatt's study is also peopled with Paraiyars and is situated in Tamil Nadu. This author's opinions were to be discussed at length afterwards, but it can be noted here that Moffatt showed how the untouchables, instead of challenging the social order of which they are victims, are, on the contrary, its faithful agents and go as far as reproducing amongst themselves the complete set of 'institutions and relationships of rank' of the caste system. They live in consensus with the dominant social order. This was Moffatt's reply to the question which every researcher who works among the untouchables asks: are there essential differences between the untouchables and the rest of caste society? Are the untouchables part of the system?

Moffatt's replies are inspired by the work of Louis Dumont who is without doubt the greatest modern analyst of Indian society. Dumont argued that there is no separation between the world of the high castes and the untouchables, but rather a structural relationship of complementarity (1966: 79). Dumont also showed that hierarchy was the explicative principle of the caste system. Any ideology which underpins the caste system is, according to Dumont, the negation of freedom and, above all, equality. Thus the caste system is nothing more than the institutionalization of hierarchy. It is on this idea of hierarchy that the whole caste system is hinged. Moreover hierarchy is not a simple linear gradation; rather it is a structural principle or a 'system of oppositions' (ibid.: 59). Hierarchy is based, among other things, on the fundamental opposition between the pure and the impure which is at the basis of any relationship in Indian society. For

Dumont, all fundamental relationships in Indian society are thus hierarchical and are expressed in the form of opposition between the pure and the impure.

Dumont's views have, it is true, been questioned, but it is difficult to deny the importance of his work and all research today takes its stance in terms of what he wrote. Consider the case of Parry who has further explored a fundamental idea found in the French anthropologist's theories. If the caste world is indeed a structural universe, then there can be no absolute distinction between what goes on inside and outside the caste. In other words, we expect to find in the internal constitution of the caste the essential principles which govern external relationships. Hierarchy should thus permeate the internal relationships of the caste. The sub-castes and different sections of the caste must therefore be ruled by the same principles as the system taken as a whole (see Dumont 1957: iii). Parry has reused this idea which accurately explains the Rajput society which he studied in North India:

'The "encompassing" ideology of hierarchy permeates every sphere of social life, and even the subordination of the tenant to his landlord and of the subject to his rules is expressed in the same symbolic language' (1979: 6).

It is true that Parry's study deals with the Rajputs, an orthodox high-caste group, and it is legitimate to ask the question if the hypothesis would also be acceptable in the case of untouchables. Our knowledge of the lower sections of Indian society is doubtless limited, but we have sufficient material to be able to reply to this question. Patwardhan (1973: 7) writes for example, 'There is a sub-system of the Harijans which is to a lesser extent a replica or a miniature of the wider caste system.' Further on, he shows that the Mahars are themselves divided into superior and bastard divisions (ibid.: 29, 40) and even in Maharashtra, the authority of the great leader Ambedkar, of the Mahar caste, was contested by the Mang and Chamar untouchables (ibid.: 120). As to the Chamars, who are the most important untouchable caste of North India, they are divided into numerous sub-castes who often refuse to eat and drink together (Briggs 1920: 46). The differences can be so great that a Satnâmi Chamar can be excommunicated if he is touched by a Chamar sweeper (ibid.: 223). The different untouchable castes of a village in the North studied by J.M. Mahar (1972: 19) do not consider

themselves as forming a group which shares a common identity: their myths of origins are different, each caste possesses its own well where the other untouchables cannot draw water and they all claim to be superior to the others.

In South India, the situation does not seem to be different: the Holeru untouchables in the state of Mysore are divided into two groups, the Celâvdis and the Cenniyas between which there exists a 'constant rivalry' (Harper 1968: 63). The Madigas of Andhra Pradesh are also divided into many sections which fulfil different functions in the community: the Nuka Sandayyas are the descendants of the founder of the caste; the Baindlas are the priests of Madiga marriages; the Sindus are the minstrels, the Mashtos are the acrobats and the Dakkals are at the bottom of the hierarchy (Dube 1955: 42). In Tamil Nadu, when the Nadars started to rise socially, the Pallars, another untouchable caste, helped the high castes in the bloody repression of the Nadar villages (Ghurye 1969: 395). This phenomenon of fission became even more accentuated in the recent past to the extent that Enthoven was able to write:

'Modern India, having created a caste of chauffeurs from the menials who tend motor-cars, is almost ripe for a Rolls-Royce caste rejecting food or marriage with the Fords' (quoted by Hutton 1973: 116).

This was meant as a joke, of course, but it expresses the degree of sophistication which the division between castes is able to attain. Moffatt's book constitutes the continuation and systematization of the elements developed above. For the first time, a study was entirely devoted to the problem and Moffatt thus takes up Dumont's hypothesis according to which hierarchy permeates all the social relationships of Indian society and hence explains the relationships within the caste as well as the relationships between the castes. He then applies this to the Paraiyars of east Tamil Nadu and notices that they not only live in perfect conformity with the system, but that they reproduce this very system amongst themselves: the Paraiyars are themselves divided into specialized and hierarchized sub-castes.

This gives a brief summary of the elements at my disposal before beginning my research. It seemed to me important to verify these hypotheses in a region of Tamil Nadu which had not yet been explored by anthropologists. It was also interesting to examine the case of the Catholics who represent an important minority in Tamil Nadu

but who had not yet been made the object of detailed research. My principal interest was thus the caste as an institution but also the particularities of the untouchables in relationship to the high castes. Like many young researchers, I considered that Louis Dumont's work was essential to the understanding of Indian society. I therefore expected to find that hierarchy 'permeated' Valghira Manickam just as so many others had observed about different regions of India before me. Hence, Gough's statement (1960: 44) according to which the Pallars show a 'fanatical insistence on equality' seemed to me erroneous at first sight. Was not the author indulging in wishful thinking when she noted that many Pallars became communists (1978: 350)? In an article entitled 'The Brahmanical view of caste', Berreman (1979) contested in the same way that the hierarchy was omnipresent in the Indian social system. According to Berreman, Dumont had confused model (Brahmanical in this case) and practice. He had not been concerned with what those who were on the bottom rung of the social ladder thought. If he had looked at reality, Dumont would have seen that the attempts to stop the oppression of the caste system are constant facts of social life (1979: 159). Again, according to Berreman, hierarchy is a sterile notion which could not account for the inferior sections of Indian society.

My experiences during my stay at Valghira Manickam brought me to partially revise the judgement which I had formulated concerning these last two points of view. In truth, the Paraiyars, be they Hindu or Christian, are not divided into hierarchized sub-castes. They do not have specialists and, on the contrary, they are opposed to any kind of centralization amongst themselves. To be sure, it was undeniable that hierarchy still explained the relationships between the Paraiyars and the other castes, and in particular with the Pallars, the Kallars and the Udayars. But hierarchy *did not permeate all their social relationships* since the Paraiyars all appeared equal and this equality was fiercely defended. Gough's expression 'fanatical insistence' strikes me as being badly formulated since the Paraiyars have not developed a real egalitarian ideology. It is more a case of a negative attitude, opposed to any kind of hierarchy among themselves. Hence, it is not possible to see hierarchy permeating social relationships as a whole, as is the case with the Rajputs of Kangra: the relationships between wife-givers and wife-takers, between the old and the young, between man and wife are not exacerbated by

hierarchy. Isogamy, for example, is an absolute rule, old age and 'seniority' in general are not universal values here. There is quite clearly a tendency towards equality within Paraiyar society.

Such considerations must not, however, lead us to consider that Dumont's theory is completely undermined by these new elements. On the contrary, the Paraiyars distinguish themselves from the Pallars and consider the Sakkilyars as clearly inferior. They still show marks of respect and submission towards the high castes, but this relative acceptance of hierarchy concerns relationships outside of the caste. Further, I was able to observe that the rules of pollution and distance which are indicators of hierarchy are followed in a much looser way by the Paraiyars and the Pallars. Thus, the Pallars claim that they do not drink the Paraiyars' water, but in daily life it is not uncommon to see Pallars drink a glass of water in a Paraiyar house. In addition, it seems to me that the untouchables today question *untouchability* and by this the hierarchy of the caste system. This is a recent phenomenon which is far from having reached completion, but there is little doubt that Harijans today question more and more the legitimacy of their oppression and their myths of origin are a witness to this contestation. The caste as such does not seem to me to be questioned, but rather the difference which exists between the castes, that is to say the notions of purity and impurity.

This point is, however, a secondary one in the problem we are dealing with here. This study attempts to show that there exists a distortion between what happens inside the caste and what happens outside of it. The Paraiyars match off external authority and domination against a certain internal anarchy, a relationship of equality among all the Paraiyars against oppression.

The second point which will be the central subject of this book is the consequence of the first. It seems to me that this internal equality constitutes the originality of the Paraiyars compared with the high castes and thus distinguishes what has been called the 'small tradition' from the 'great tradition'. Equality brings with itself important consequences which will be explored throughout this study: these consequences manifest themselves as absence of leadership and internal organization as, importantly, propensity for quarrelling (principally for reasons of jealousy), in inability to undertake corporate action, in absence of universal values and customs which compel recognition from all, in weakness of ritual and contempt for dogma;

finally, the Paraiyars have internal laws which are much less constraining than those of the high castes and are a much weaker social control. They result in a greater freedom, notably on a moral and sexual level, in a greater laxity in religious beliefs even among the Catholics and in a certain offhandedness with respect to social and religious rites.

The deplorable economic situation of the Paraiyars does not allow them to radically change this situation. Most of them still work in a traditional sector—as coolies or as brick-makers—where they are more or less self-employed; they are little organized and all share the same miserable lot. As we shall see again later there is also the fact of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage which joins families by twos and hinders any form of systematic organization of kinship. This also strengthens the tendency which I call, in general, 'fragmentation'.

In the preceding lines I have just said that this kind of intrinsic egalitarianism constitutes, together with its social consequences, the very originality of the Paraiyars compared with the high castes. Does this then mean that the authors quoted above have made a complete mistake as far as the untouchables are concerned? Or, on the other hand, do the Paraiyars constitute an exception among the untouchables of India? We do not think so and, without wishing to be opportunistic, it is possible to imagine that the two points of view are complementary. It is undeniable that the untouchables, including the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam, themselves respect untouchability as concerns inferior castes. The Sakkilyars are universally considered to be inferiors and polluters by the inhabitants of the village.

If one examines more closely the examples cited above, it appears that the authors have said little of what happens inside the caste and even less of the sub-caste. Thus, even when a caste is divided into hierarchized sub-castes, as is often the case, we can ask ourselves what happens inside each one of them. It then becomes possible to discover a level which is not impregnated by hierarchy. The objection can be raised that Moffatt went beyond this exterior understanding in order to analyse the Paraiyars from the inside. This is precisely the point: Moffatt does indeed distinguish the sections, called *vakaiyaras*, inside the Paraiyar caste. These sections are only imperfectly hierarchized and intermarriage often takes place. In addition, Moffatt does not go any further in his analysis: he does not tell us what happens inside each *vakaiyara*. Is hierarchy the absolute rule

there as well? It is not a question of us being overcritical since, according to Dumont, hierarchy penetrates *all* social relationships. Finally, Moffatt only mentions the struggles of the untouchables of Endavur against the oppression of the high castes. He does not deem it useful to discuss them in relationship with his hypothesis. His study does not really contradict the views of Dumont and Moffatt, but it does reduce their scope.

In brief, social life can only with difficulty be reduced to a simple set of oppositions. It is always a complex matter. Thus, for example, the Paraiyars give great importance to family relationships, but they are also the first to argue about who has family authority. In the same way, in a context where hierarchy rules there can also exist social units which are governed by a certain equality. The untouchables are, at the same time, inside and outside the system. The concept of *Sanskritization*, which describes the process of social mobility where the inferior castes imitate the values and customs of the high castes, correctly expresses the ambiguity of the social position of the inferior castes.

The first chapter of this study is a general description of the village and its inhabitants. We shall discover its particularities, the various component communities and some physical aspects of its culture. The second chapter tackles the heart of the matter since we shall attempt to analyse the forms of power which are exercised: the absence of authority and social control as well as the strong propensity for quarrelling will be the major elements brought out by this chapter. These elements are situated in the context defined above: absence of organization contributes to maintaining equality among the villagers. This equality is particularly brought out by the analysis of the caste structure which will be given in Chapter Four. Before this, it will be shown that the predominance of the traditional economic sectors constitutes an important element of the social structure of the village. The modern sector is little developed since salaried employment is rare. There is no real formation of social classes and few important economic differences despite the new 'opportunities' and the development of education in schools.

In Chapter Four, we shall deal with problems related to the caste. The internal organization of the caste shows that the Paraiyars of the village only belong to a badly structured sub-caste without a true sociological foundation. They do not establish a clear difference with

respect to the other Paraiyars and do not have hierarchized units. The inequality between the Pallars and the Paraiyars is more formal than real, but the Kallars[1] still dominate the untouchables and have maintained certain forms of dependence. Chapter Five brings us to the analysis of kinship relations among the Paraiyars. Patrilateral cross-cousin marriage asserts itself as one of the key institutions of the Paraiyar social structure. We shall see that it forestalls the making of a certain social differentiation by preventing, for example, hypergamy resulting from a fixed arrangement of matrimonial exchange. In addition, the large family units found in certain high castes are unknown to the Paraiyars and their ceremonies are thus extremely reduced.

This brings us quite naturally to Chapter Six which will be devoted to the Paraiyars' religion. It is a marginal religion since the untouchables are traditionally excluded from the principal forms of worship. Religious knowledge among the Paraiyars is poor and their rites are reduced to the bare minimum. The Paraiyars' religion is essentially pragmatic: they pray in order to obtain something from the gods. Hence there is no recognized authority of dogma. Collective acts are reduced to a minimum, apart from religious festivals which are the only collective acts in the village.

[1]It is important here to distinguish between the Pallars, an untouchable caste slightly superior to the Paraiyars and the Kallars, a high warrior caste which owns a lot of the land in the region.

1. The Village and its Inhabitants

During this study, my purpose is to take the reader into the world of a little village in South India—a kind of 'guided tour' of the village social life. This tour will not, of course, take us through the village itself but through an intellectual reconstruction of it. This involves the setting of a stage and so, before discovering the actors, we shall describe, to continue the theatrical metaphor, the scenery, the costumes and the circumstances of the social plot which is to follow. Thus it is the essential characteristics of the village and its inhabitants which will be the obvious subject of this chapter.

A) The Village

1) The Geographical Location

Tamil Nadu is one of the big States of South India. Its people's culture is rich and goes back several millennia. In 1981, there were almost 50 million Tamils, that is to say approximately the population of a large European country. The Ramnad district counts more than 3 million inhabitants. Ramnad is traditionally known as the country of the Maravars. The history of Ramnad and its rajas, the Sethupathi (Kadhirvel 1977), has not left a lasting memory in our village. British colonization is also a period of which the villagers have only very vaguely heard. For them, kings and princes succeeded to the throne one after another, but the burden of work always stayed the same.

Taken as a whole, the district is poor and little endowed by nature. It rains for hardly two months a year and the irrigation of cultivated fields is scarce. The population basically lives from agriculture, even though the soil is dry and not very fertile. Rice is the principal crop

of the whole of the southern part of India. Industry in the district is still at an embryonic stage.

Devakottai is a little village in a rural zone, situated 100 kilometres east of Madurai and 100 kilometres south-west of Trichy. It is a small administrative and commercial centre and chief town of the *taluk* (the administrative division which ranks just below the district). One of the remarkable characteristics of this town, which otherwise has few, is the presence of Chettiar traders.

This trader caste, which is to be found throughout the whole region which is sometimes called *Chettinâd* (the land of the Chettiars), is famous for having emigrated to various Far Eastern countries, mainly Malaysia and Singapore, and more so for having got rich there. The Chettiars, who are the highest caste and the most orthodox after the Brahmans, built large houses which look like fortresses in their home country. Today they play an important role in the town's administration. Though the Chettiars are economically and ritually superior, it is none the less the Kallars who form the 'dominant' caste, that is to say it is they who control land in the villages of the region.

Thieves by tradition, this ex-criminal caste is today pacified, at least to a large extent, since it requires little to inflame their warlike instincts. Traditionally, the Kallars used to be organized in confederations at the head of which was an important family. Oonjanai, the chief town of one of these confederations, includes the Kallar villages near Valghira Manickam. The Kallars are basically farmers, but like all the dominant rural castes, they try as far as they can to introduce themselves into economically modern positions. As far as the Harijans are concerned, I think it is possible to say that the Kallars constitute the dominant and repressive caste *par excellence*. Kanda Devi is the Kallar village closest to Valghira Manickam.

Although the Catholic Church is numerically small in this region, there are none the less some Christian villages. Among the Catholics, the Udayars form the dominant caste. This caste is made up of small farmers and, together with the Vellalars, holds a certain number of dominant positions in the Catholic hierarchy. Mullikundu and Sadayankadu are two Udayar villages close to Valghira Manickam.

Coming from Karaikudi and when nearing Devakottai, there appears, on the left, a kind of small oasis of greenery in the middle of the stretches of red earth which encompass the little asphalt road. In this green space Valghira Manickam nestles, a quiet little village

surrounded by brick-kilns several metres high, which give observers a clue to the inhabitants' profession. There is no motor road leading to the village, even though it is possible for a car to get there during the dry season. Ox-carts, on the other hand, can take a number of other ways, but once the first rains have fallen, they are often stranded in the village.

Devakottai occupies an important place in the life of the village which is orientated towards Devakottai rather than towards any other village. There is no doubt that this is one of the first essential traits of Valghira Manickam and its first particularity. If we were in a big city, we would say that Valghira Manickam is a bit like the working-class suburbs of the city. Of course, Devakottai is far from being a city, but our village is none the less the place from which part of Devakottai's manpower comes. Devakottai is also an administrative centre and a market. It is possible to find there everything which the village needs and which the traditional rural economy does not manage to provide. There are also textile and hardware shops, supply shops with large sacks of rice, lentils and flour, photographers, 'cycle shops' the principal activity of which seems to be inflating bicycle tires, restaurants which are called 'hotels', pedlars of eggs, of fruit and of flowers, not to mention the traditional Indian shops which sell one is not quite sure what and where it is possible to find almost everything from a ball-point pen to a suitcase together with school notebooks and cheap jewellery. In brief, Devakottai offers much more than the villagers can afford to buy.

In the services sector, Devakottai offers many facilities: there is a main post-office, offices of the water department and the electricity board, a 'Block Development Office' (BDO) for the development of rural areas, a quite lively bus-station, law courts and a certain number of doctors. The government hospital is, of course, an important place. There is no train station at Devakottai itself: the 'Devakottai Road' station, on the Madras-Ramaeswaram line, is near Karaikudi more than 10 kilometres away.

Devakottai enjoys an important school network. Two of the Catholic schools are the most sought after: De Britto, for boys, is run by the Jesuits; St Mary's, for girls, is run by the Sisters of Lyon (all of whom are Indian). There are also a fair number of government schools of less quality and, since a number of years, the town prides itself with a small 'college' which gives some university lectures.

Two young boys from the village have studied there. There are also many temples in town, the upkeep of which is due to donations from the Chettiars who hold sway over the local Lyons Club. The Catholic parish is situated at Ramnagar, not far from the village.

During the last few years, the geographical world of the villagers has considerably enlarged itself, in particular because of the habit of going to work in Madras during a large part of the year. The 'Tamil consciousness' of the villagers has been strengthened because of this. Being Tamil does indeed mean something. Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka, represents everything which is outside Tamil Nadu. A woman whose son works in Goa will say that he is 'near Bangalore'; Delhi and Bombay are known as names, but they do not mean very much. My skin colour was compared to that of Mrs Gandhi's of whom I was asked if she was, like me, a Belgian. Even the national Congress Party is only known by its Tamil leaders such as Kamaraj. Ambedkar is described as a Pallar by the few people who have heard of him and Gandhi as an Iyer (Shaivite Brahman). One wonders if Kerala is really in India (the latter being often confused with Tamil Nadu) and it is possible to say that the villagers do not really manifest a pronounced national consciousness.

The awakening of the village to the outer world is still very recent. The habit of going to Madras to make bricks has gone a little way to enlarge the horizons of these people who had remained for centuries in their village. As a point of fact, the principal activity of the villagers, which is brick-making, is in itself externally centred since a rural economy could never absorb so high a production.

2) A Rapid Overview of the Village

Little paths lead from the village in every direction. One can get to Devakottai across the rice paddies, which is the usual way, or across the *kanmaï* (natural river basin) which is remarkable because of its natural beauty: at sunset, the reddening sun is reflected in the water while in the distance women graciously carry water-pots on their heads. Like most of the villages in this arid region, Valghira Manickam nestles in an oasis of greenery.

The village is renowned in the region of Devakottai for its sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of Velankanni, Arockyai Mary, where many pilgrims come to pray, mainly because of illness or possession. Hence there is a constant presence of people from outside who reside in the village and this cosmopolitan character gives it an

unusual animation which somewhat breaks the languidness of rural life. There is always something happening in the village, most often when there is a spectacular case of possession. On Saturdays and Wednesdays, the sanctuary's activities are at their most intense. A shelter and a rudimentary kitchen, attached to the sanctuary, allow the pilgrims to spend several days in the village and even, in some very serious cases, a number of months.

Not far from the sanctuary stands the church, made the most imposing building by its size. It is a rather ugly construction made of concrete, the dimensions of which do not correspond to its function. The church was built to house the statue of Arockyai Mary, but the legend claims that the statue was opposed to being transferred and the church has almost fallen into disuse from a religious point of view. Mass is said there once a year on the occasion of the village festival. On the other hand, the church which is situated in the geographical centre of the village is also the centre from a social point of view. The parvis, covered by a tiled roof, is used as a nursery school and also as a place for meeting and relaxation. There are always a few young people and adults who loll there. It is also the public dormitory since the huts are too small to house a whole family and young boys, as well as some adult men, go there every evening to spend the night. The cosmopolitan aspect which characterizes the other religious building is absent. Here everything takes place among the Paraiyars alone. The church is more a secular centre than a place of worship. On the Hindu side, there are few buildings of this size. The little temples dedicated to Mariyamman, the goddess of smallpox, do not have the same importance as the sanctuary.

There are two sources of water in the village. The well, situated to the north-east, is used by the Christian and Hindu Paraiyars. It does not provide water the whole year through and already in June it often runs dry. In August, the women have to go quite far away in order to find water and sometimes have to wait an hour before being able to draw water from a well. During the dry months, it is difficult to wash oneself. The Pallars, the second caste in the village, have at their disposal a water-pump which is more than 60 metres deep.

A natural reservoir of water to the south-west fills up during the rainy season and is used as a public bath. Children go there to bathe as soon as the first showers start. This becomes a day of festivity

and everything which can be washed from one's grandfather to one's bicycle, not to mention the oxen, go there during the afternoon.

There is only one tea shop in the village. It is run by a Kallar who lives there with his wife. Tea, coffee and articles like betel leaves and nuts, bread rolls, *beedis*, etc. are available. Both Pallars and Paraiyars go there even though the first tend to be a majority. The owner of the tea shop enjoys no prestige in the village which does not respect him particularly. A Kallar who demeans himself by living in a Harijan environment is not considered worthy of much respect. There is a small shop kept by a Nadar who sells, principally to pilgrims, coloured water, biscuits, sweetmeats, cigarettes, dried bread, etc. This venture has inspired some commercial vocations among the villagers: a few of them sell sweetmeats from time to time, but this is a minor activity which only lasts a few weeks, just the time it takes to earn a rupee or two.

There is a Christian cemetery and a Hindu cemetery to the east of the village in the *kanmaï*. There are no interesting monuments to be found there.

3) The Origin of the Village

The origin of the village does not go back to ancient times. It is impossible to date anything, and so one will have to make do with approximations. The name of the village is not at all Christian. On the contrary, it has been borrowed from the name of a small temple dedicated to Kâliamman which is to the east of the village. This goddess is called the lucky (*valakira*) pearl (*manickam*). It seems that the Udayars, a farmer caste, were the first inhabitants of the village. After a certain time, they went and settled in Sadayankadu where they still live. This must have taken place about the beginning of this century since the old people of the village had not known of any Udayar who lived there.

The peopling of the village constitutes a rather remarkable phenomenon which gives it its essential characteristic. Traditionally speaking, the Indian village is made up of several castes: the farmers are politically predominant, a few Brahman families enjoy ritual superiority, several artisan and service castes (blacksmiths, carpenters, barbers, washermen, etc.) make up the picture to which are inevitably added some untouchable families who live apart and who carry out manual and impure tasks. These Harijans were often a minority and always dependent. They were attached to the village which they could

not leave. In Tamil Nadu, this colony of untouchables was called the *cêri* as opposed to the *ûr*, the village properly speaking, where the pure castes lived. Often, in the smaller villages, the *cêri* numbered hardly more than two or three huts. The untouchables did not receive money but were paid in kind. Even today, in many villages this situation is to be found even though remuneration in cash tends to become generalized. In such circumstances, a village peopled almost exclusively by untouchables is a somewhat unusual phenomenon and doubtless relatively recent.

It seems that it was the grandparents of those who are now adults who left the surrounding villages to come and settle in Valghira Manickam. These ancestors are still known to everyone. The explanation is unanimous: it is said that these ancestors had had enough of working as *Ur Paraiyars* and came to live here in complete independence. The father of the elderly Arulananda left, for example, the village of Semmamilli where he was obliged to work for the high castes and came to settle here where a few Paraiyars were already living.

Such is the indigenous theory concerning the origin of the village. It seems a highly probable one, so much the more so since Devakottai offered new economic resources to the untouchables who wished to leave the stage of rural economy where they played the most thankless of roles. Brick-making thence took on more and more importance. The Catholic Church, whose foreign missionaries were less implicated in caste questions, doubtless encouraged this independence.

This support, combined with the anti-Brahman movement at the beginning of the century, and British legislation, perhaps explain the fact that the high castes let these few families go, especially since population growth assured sufficient regeneration of manpower. In any case, our village is a privileged place. It will be interesting to see what became of the untouchables once they had broken the bonds of economic dependence.

4) Land and Community

Valghira Manickam is not a homogeneous village. Administratively speaking it is divided into two separate parts. The southern part, essentially peopled by (Hindu) Pallars and a few Christian Paraiyar families, is called Pani Pulan Vayal and belongs to the jurisdiction of the panchayat of Devakottai. The rest of the village, which can

be called Valghira Manickam, comprises the majority of the Christian Paraiyar population and all the Hindu Paraiyars. This part belongs to the panchayat of Kanda Devi, the neighbouring Kallar village. This conglomerate settlement, composed of these two parts, is a clearly distinct geographical entity but it does not constitute a unified sociological unit. Indeed there is no common name for the two parts even though people from outside sometimes call it Tanichavoorani, from the name of a neighbouring Kallar hamlet.

Three communities live in this conglomerate settlement: firstly the Hindu Pallars, the untouchable caste which has the highest status. They live in Pani Pulan Vayal and our study will only deal with them as regards the analysis of the relationships which they have with the Paraiyars. There are only about thirty Pallar houses. From now on, when I speak of the 'village', it is Valghira Manickam that will be meant essentially. The Christian Paraiyars are distributed throughout 86 houses, of which about twenty are *de jure* in the Pani Pulan Vayal territory. This division is purely administrative and has no influence on the life of the villagers; for my analysis therefore, I have included these houses in Valghira Manickam. The Catholic Paraiyars form a real community. The third group living in the village is made up of Hindu Paraiyars. The two Paraiyar communities, who get on very well together, share a common road.

Srinivas (1965) claimed that the notion of a village has, in India, a real meaning which transcends caste divisions. Valghira Manickam seems to show, on the contrary, that Dumont and Pocock (1957) were right in denying the sociological reality of the Indian village. The conglomerate settlement which interests us here does not have its own social reality. The Pallars and Paraiyars have no institutions in common and maintain very few contacts. The children of the two castes tend not to mix at games even if there is no taboo on this point. There are never any common meetings and the smallest spark is sufficient to set off a community storm. Some Pallars call Valghira Manickam by the contemptuous term *'cêri'* or 'untouchable quarter'. The Hindu Pallars and Paraiyars both have their own village goddesses and the Catholic village festival is that of the Christian community alone.

The Hindu and Christian Paraiyars have, it is true, few institutions in common, but the two communities maintain excellent relationships. Men and women easily make bonds of friendship and, though

less often, there are romances. The daily life of the two communities seems to intermingle. The children play together and people address each other using kinship terms.

Yet there is no organic link between these two communities which each send a representative to the panchayat of Kanda Devi. The 'village' in the sociological sense of the term thus has a tendency to be equated with the local segment of a caste.

It is interesting to note that the Christians do not really know what to call their village. Some of them speak of Pani Pulan Vayal, others of Tanichavoorani and, especially among the young people, more and more of the villagers have borrowed the Hindu name 'Valghira Manickam'. I have therefore myself adopted this last name which better expresses Paraiyar identity.

5) The Solidarity of the Village

One of the most noteworthy characteristics of the village remains none the less the weakness of its institutions and the villagers' aversion to any form of internal hierarchizing. People like to emphasize, 'there are 86 Christian chiefs'. Village councils are rare, constraints are reduced to a minimum and jealousy is universal. We shall come back to these questions at greater length, but I would like to show here that, despite all this, there is a certain solidarity in the village and that, in spite of what the villagers want to say, being a member of the village entails certain rights and duties.

The clearest proof of the existence of a certain community feeling appears in the regular concern for the reputation of the village. If a girl behaves badly in town, everyone complains that the name of the village has been dragged in the mud. If something undesirable happens at the sanctuary, the young people assert that their reputation has been sullied and that they do not dare to show themselves at Devakottai. 'This village is the worst of all, we are ashamed of it.'

This community feeling culminates each year during the religious festival of the Virgin Mary, which is the festival of the Catholic community. Eight days before the festivities, all the villagers have to be present in the village. The flag which heralds the festival is then hoisted on a flag-pole in the middle of the village and nobody can spend a single night outside the village during the whole week. The villagers feel very proud of their village festival and are unwearying in its praises. Everyone has to pay a tax for the festival: those who are not an integral part of the village, like the seven families who

live in the *kanmaï*, do not pay the tax. During this festival, quarrels are overcome and a certain consensus is achieved.

We shall come back later to the village festival, but we can see that there exists a certain form of unity in the village. This unity however does not manage to express itself in a positive fashion. What I mean is that the villagers are incapable of working together in order to attain a precise goal. When the Udayars of Mullikundu beat up quite seriously Arockyam the catechist, who had had a relationship with a girl from their village, the indignant villagers joined together and went to the parish to protest but were incapable of going any further.

Death brings with it a sort of mourning for the whole village. Thus, if someone dies during the sixteen days which precede the raising of the flag which heralds the festival, the festival is put off for another week since it is unthinkable to celebrate the festival if the period of mourning (sixteen days) has not ended. During my stay, village solidarity showed itself in a rather remarkable fashion: Taïnis, who was very ill, used to live in the sanctuary, deprived of everything, and lived by beggary. When he passed away, the whole village felt a shock: many young people went and dug his grave and the whole village went with him to his last resting-place. No one went to work that day, out of solidarity with a man who was the most deprived of them all.

There is a certain feeling of belonging to the village: uxorilocal couples take many years before being considered as being part of the village. The village of a family is thus the one where the father is born. Some men continue to pay taxes in their place of origin. After many years, they pay taxes in the village in which they reside and are considered as being members of this village. However, if their parents have land in their native village, they will probably go back there to take possession of their inheritance when their parents die.

6) The 'Development' of the Village

This inability to find a positive way of expressing village solidarity finds its equivalent in the scantiness of the village's infrastructure. The lack of unity, the quarrels and various vexations which result from this always stop the villagers from obtaining the essential facilities of a normal village. Everyone is conscious of the fact and regrets it, but nobody is able to overcome these difficulties. 'No one

has taught us to be united', is often heard and rightly so. 'Here, even two brothers are enemies.'

These last few years, twelve houses in the village have been electrified thanks to a platoon of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) which also organizes vaccination sessions. The NCC is also at the origin of a system of loans for buying cows which is subsidized by the Milk Cooperative Society and was extremely popular, since tens of villagers bought cows with a loan which they will probably never be able to repay.

Apart from the few paternalistic NCC aids, little is done for the village. The villagers never weary of raising the subject of the number of projects which have escaped them because of their lack of dynamism and unity. A striking example in these last few years was that of the road linking the village to Devakottai for which the Block Development Office had allocated a sum of 68,000 rupees. The parish priest had obtained the allocation in order to carry out the project but came up against opposition from the Pallars who prevented its realization.

A few years beforehand, the 'One Thousand Wells' (OTW) project had tried to start a brickyard in the village. Here again, the project, which worked for a short time, ended in failure even though the villagers were less responsible in this case. None the less, every undertaking made by the Paraiyars soon comes up against small-mindedness and all sorts of problems. This is an essential feature of this society: absence of organization and centralization, an inability to be united and the strong jealousy which its members display. All these elements are linked together and come up regularly in this survey. The villagers' solidarity only makes itself apparent in certain well-defined cases. The rest of the time, their social life is governed by division. The villagers often compare the scantiness of their institutions with the Udayar village of Mullikundu which has a water-pump, electricity, an *oorani* (pond) and a school. 'Our village is the most backward of all', they say, to which they bitterly add: 'If there are a hundred families, there are a hundred factions! This is why we are unable to make progress.'

B) The Dwellings

1) Description and Use

There are 86 Christian Paraiyar houses and 28 Hindu Paraiyar houses, a total of 114. The dwellings are rudimentary. The house (*vîdu*) does not have the same functions as those we know in the West. It is not a solid shelter because its resistance is precarious. Nor does it provide the privacy which we hold so dear since it is hardly possible to remain standing inside and so people spend little time there; conversations which take place inside are easily overheard outside. Though the hut provides little security and even less privacy, it remains none the less essential: the family meets there, eats there and at least part of the family sleeps there. Its importance seems as much psychological as physical: it is above all a 'home port', and it is also the place where the family's scanty belongings are stocked. Most of the time, it is impossible to eat inside the house where it is too dark and too narrow. Cooking never takes place inside except when it rains. The various occupations, which in our cultures take place inside the house (cooking, dish-washing, washing, meals, rest, conversations, etc.) take place *in front of* the house or on the rudimentary veranda. The Paraiyars are truly sedentary even if their roots are less entrenched than ours. Nothing is easier than building, or better still, rebuilding a house. Were it not for limited access to land, there is no doubt that moving would take place more frequently. Any reason is good enough for moving one's place of abode a little further away: if several couples live under the same roof, sooner or later they will separate and a precarious hut will be built on the family property. In the same way, it is possible for a house which is in a place where water tends to stagnate to be abandoned. Two frequent reasons for moving are: a house inhabited by evil spirits which vex its occupants or a house which simply 'brings bad luck' to its inhabitants.

The Paraiyar house usually amounts to very little and a little hut can be built in a few hours. There is another kind of house made of more solid materials which is called *pakka* as opposed to the huts (*kudisai*). In general, however, the houses are very modest. There is only one room with one entrance and no windows.

Almost 70 per cent of the houses are huts and among the Christians this percentage is even higher. A *pakka* house is much more expensive, by 5,000 to 10,000 rupees, although certain *pakka* houses

are not cemented. In any case, only Paraiyars with regular wages can build such houses.

The interior of the houses is very bare and there is no furniture except, in some families, a shaky old bed which serves for visitors, as is the custom in rural India. As for the villagers, they live on the floor: they cook, eat and sleep on the ground. There are no tables, chairs or cupboards in the village. Sometimes a metal trunk contains the family belongings and a cord strung from the beams serves as a wardrobe. The hearth is made from a few bricks cemented together with mud. A few households have a mortar and a slightly smaller number own a stone for crushing spices.

The utensils are just as rudimentary: a few pots for cooking and keeping water, a few metal plates, some ladles and knives, billhooks and shovels suffice for the needs of the cook. Bedding consists of a straw mat. During the rainy season, an old lungi is used as a blanket. Finally, only the poorest families do not have a framed photo depicting a deceased forebear, a saint, the Virgin Mary or a film actor like Shivaji Ganesan, the darling of Tamil Nadu.

The veranda is an essential part of the house. Some small huts do not have one, but in general the veranda is a focal point of social life, even though it is reduced to the bare minimum and it is certainly not possible to remain standing there. The Paraiyar house is not covered by the same taboos as is the traditional Hindu house. In the latter, the kitchen is in the remotest part of the house and is invested with a whole series of ritual prohibitions. Visitors are practically never allowed in there, since it is a place which is particularly susceptible to ritual pollution. The further one goes into the house, the more the prohibitions there are, so that most visitors rarely go beyond the veranda. There is nothing like this among the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam where the kitchen is more or less situated on the public thoroughfare and there are few restrictions concerning entry into the house. It is true, on the other hand, that the high castes never, under any circumstances, enter a Paraiyar house and there is no caste inferior to the Paraiyars in the region. The ritual taboos concerning the house are minimal. Visitors prefer the veranda to the inside of the house because of its better ventilation; it is also a good place to sleep.

The upkeep of the house is reduced to a bare minimum. The wattle-and-daub walls and floors have to be strengthened regularly, but this job only takes a few minutes. The Tamil custom of tracing geometric diagrams (*kôlam*) on the threshold as an invitation to

Lakshmi is not often followed. There is no shelter attached to the house serving as a bathroom and, of course, no lavatory. This operation takes place in public here. The paraffin lamps are used parsimoniously since the cost of fuel is very high and so once night has fallen, the village is often plunged into darkness.

2) House-Building

Compared with the ritual of the high castes (see Reiniche 1981), the Paraiyars have to comply with few rules in order to build a *pakka* house and the ritual requirements are even fewer for building a hut.

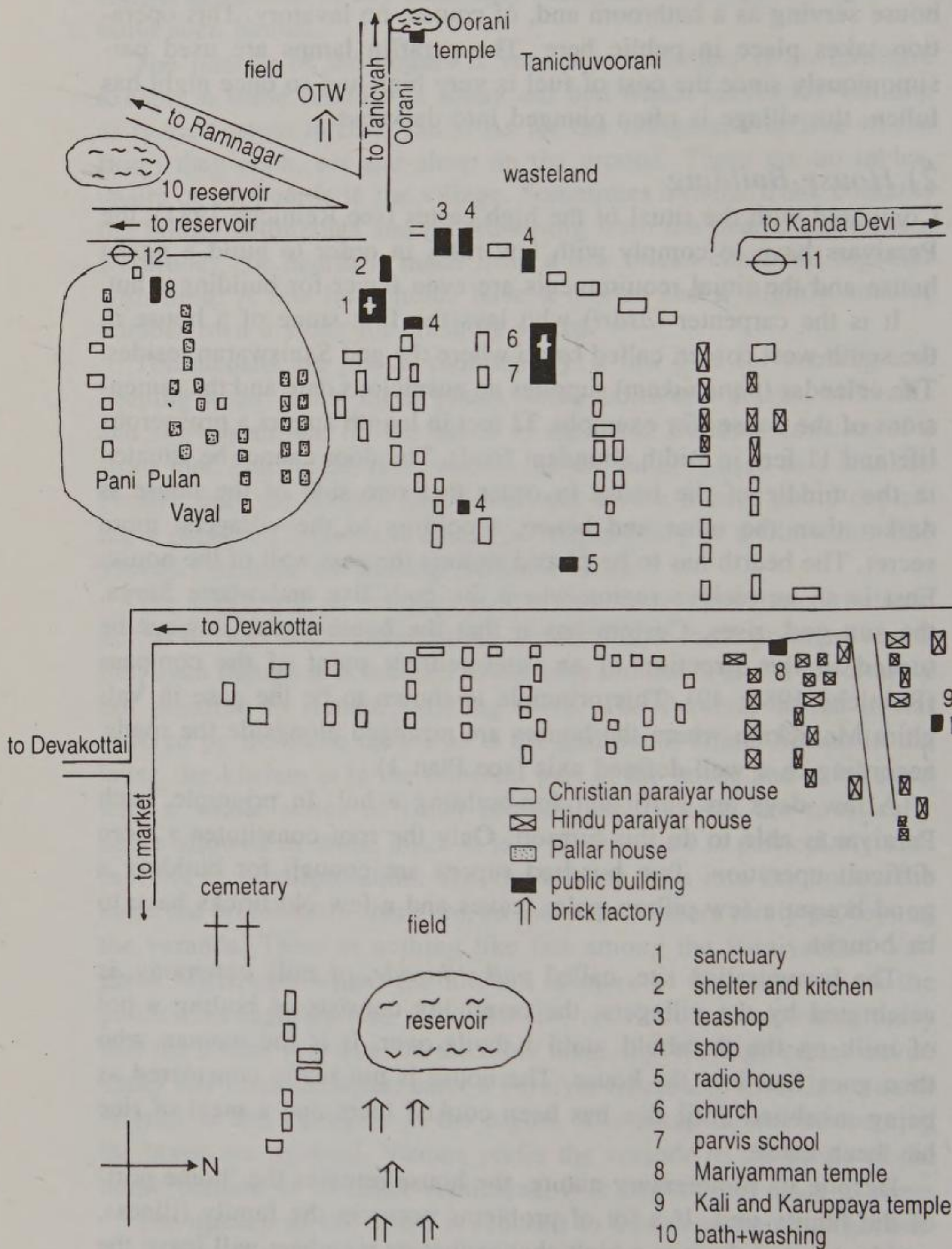
It is the carpenter (*âsâri*) who lays the first stone of a house in the south-west corner, called *kanni* where the god Saniswaran resides. The calendar (*pancankam*) supplies an auspicious date and the dimensions of the house (for example, 22 feet in length augurs a prosperous life and 11 feet in width abundant food). The door cannot be situated in the middle of the house in order that one side of the house is darker than the other and hence, according to the villagers, more secret. The hearth has to be placed against the east wall of the house. East is an auspicious region where the gods live and where Surya, the sun god, rises. Custom has it that the house should always be turned in the direction of an intermediary point of the compass (Reiniche 1981: 49). This principle is shown to be the case in Valghira Manickam where the houses are arranged alongside the roads, according to a well-defined axis (see Plan 1).

A few days are sufficient for building a hut. In principle, each Paraiyar is able to do this himself. Only the roof constitutes a more difficult operation. Two hundred rupees are enough for building a good house; a few pillars, palm leaves and a few old bricks have to be bought.

The inauguration rite, called *palkatihirade*, or milk ceremony, is celebrated by the villagers: the ceremony consists of boiling a pot of milk on the threshold, until it boils over. It is the woman who then goes first into the house. The house is not really considered as being inhabited until rice has been cooked there and a meal of rice has been eaten.

Despite its rudimentary nature, the house remains the 'home port' of the family unit. If a lot of problems occur in the family (illness, accidents, etc.) there is a high chance that its members will leave the house in order to live a little further away. The functional importance

General view of the village of Valghira Manickam.



Plan 1

of the Paraiyar house, together with its physical simplicity constitute its essential characteristics.

C) The Inhabitants

1) Population Statistics

The number of inhabitants in the village fluctuates all the time. It is sometimes difficult to say who lives in the village and who does not. The following figures are therefore relatively approximate.

To the total of Table 1, must of course be added about a hundred Pallars. On average, a house counts 4.85 inhabitants; this figure would be much higher were it not for the significant infant mortality rate. I do not have at my disposal precise figures for this last point, but most families in the village have lost one or several (up to 5) small children.

One striking characteristic of the population statistics is the sex ratio: in a sample of 327 births, I noted 53.2 per cent of girls, an unusual figure for India, which comes to 1,113 girls for a thousand boys.

These figures show, in any case, that girls are not treated worse than boys in Valghira Manickam, and this can be confirmed by my observations. In the low castes, a girl is less of a burden than in the high castes since dowries are much lower.

Table 1: The population of Valghira Manickam by community

Christian Paraiyars	432
Hindu Paraiyars	122
Total	554

Table 2: Number of births according to sex and community in Valghira Manickam

	boys	girls	total
Christian Paraiyars	120	131	251
Hindu Paraiyars	33	43	76
	153	174	327

2) Literacy and Education

Nowadays, the majority of children between seven and ten years of age go to school and the importance of school education is generally underlined, as everywhere in India. It is often claimed that the principal problem of the Harijans, along with poverty, is their lack of education.

The Harijans are thus conscious of the possibilities which education offers them, but the situation is far from ideal and often children only stay at school for a few years. Moreover, a significant number of children never attend school at all. It is only recently that the untouchables have started going to school: Arulananda remembers having attended school for a few days; one evening, at home, the goat ate all his notebooks and this put an end to his school career. Even today, many children do not have the luck of going to school: this is principally the case with the elder children who have to look after their brothers and sisters while their parents work. At the age of six or seven, these elder children, boys or girls, are veritable little parents who know exactly how to look after the babies.

Not all those who go to school are educated. After three or four years of arduous study, most of the children leave school. The slightest of reasons quickly becomes a pretext: one child catches fever at school, another picks up boils which stop him from walking, yet another has to go to work.

There is no school in the village apart from a nursery school organized by the parish. This balwadi school looks after small children from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and then provides them with a cereal meal. The majority of those who attend primary school go to Joseph's School at Ramnagar. There is nothing more captivating than to see the children of Valghira Manickam doing their homework or learning their lessons. Here there is neither desk nor chair and not even electricity and so they do their schoolwork sitting on the ground in the street. There is no question of studying after nightfall since paraffin is too costly. (It is not unusual, in the area, to see college students revising their lectures by public lighting.)

A few villagers have finished their secondary studies (SSLC), which is greatly to their credit. Only one has a university degree. Among these villagers with qualifications, only a few have obtained 'white-collar' employment, the others have had to resign themselves to make bricks. The Christian Paraiyars have not been recognized as

a 'Scheduled caste', and thus they do not enjoy the reservations accorded to that category and this again increases the difficulty of finding work. These problems hardly induce young people to continue their studies despite the favourable attitude which we noted at the beginning of this section.

3) Daily Life

Life in the village is pretty monotonous. The seasons help to break the daily routine a little. Economically speaking, one can distinguish between the dry season (January to September) and the rainy season (October to December). Brick-making stops with the arrival of the monsoon which heralds the beginning of agricultural work.

The day can be divided into four main parts:

a) *kalai*: 'morning' starts with sunrise, a little before 6 a.m. and ends around 11 a.m. This is a period of intensive work.

b) *matiannam*: 'midday' is from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. It marks the end of the day's work and is the hottest time of the day. It is followed by a siesta when this is possible.

c) *sangalam*: 'evening' starts early, around 3 p.m. It is a period of calm and stretches until sunset between 6 and 7 p.m. It is a good time for moving around, shopping, etc.

d) *iravu* or *râtri*: 'night' which starts after nightfall. This is when the last meal is taken, and the time for sleep.

The villagers rise early, generally before sunrise. Men and women relieve themselves separately. People do not wash at this hour because it is still chilly and no food is taken. A worker will take with him a small metal box where a little rice or *kanji* is put and which is eaten where he works. After eight hours of work (i.e. around 2 p.m.), the workers go home. On the way back, they take the opportunity to wash themselves, except of course at the height of the dry season when all the reservoirs are hopelessly dry. During the afternoon, men and women deal with domestic tasks or go shopping. A lot of men leave the village around 4 or 5 p.m. in order to go and drink a glass of tea at Devakottai.

During this time, the women fetch water and cook. The main meal is taken in the evening. Paraiyar women, unlike those of the high castes, are not at all confined to the house: they often go shopping in Devakottai.

Washing of clothes often takes place at the same time as washing of the body. Men use the opportunity to wash their lungi. Nobody

washes themselves naked, except for children. Soap has become almost universal. Fingernails are bitten off using one's teeth and toenails are cut with a knife or a razor-blade. Men do not shave every day.

Children have a very exciting life. They do not have to worry about food and enjoy a lot of freedom. The child is treated like a king and is cherished. Children's games and activities are innumerable. The village animals are their butts and whipping-boys. The cinema is, as everywhere in India, the great passion of the adults who would go to see a film every day if they had the means to do so. Men console themselves by drinking alcohol. Women only drink if there is alcohol in the house. Alcoholism obviously poses some social problems. The village festival is the great moment of the year which is waited for with impatience.

4) Cooking and Diet

For people as poor as the Paraiyars, looking for food is a constant preoccupation. People do not really die of starvation at Valghira Manickam, but there are constant deaths owing to malnutrition.

The staple diet of a Paraiyar is rice. 'Eating' means 'eating rice'; inversely, someone who has not eaten rice for a whole day will say that he has fasted. Rice is not only the staple diet; the height of poverty is being unable to buy rice. Apart from rice, the Paraiyars eat very little. The price of rice is a constant subject of conversation, a bit like the weather is in Europe. The past is idealized by the memory of when rice only cost a few paise. If you meet a woman coming back from the market, she will show you a few grains of rice which she has just bought. Eating 'old rice' is considered to be bad for the health.

The evening meal (*râtri sappadu*) is the principal meal. It is also the only meal for which cooking is done. Apart from rice, it consists of a small quantity of vegetables reduced to a sauce. In the morning, the Paraiyars eat the leftovers of the evening meal and the same happens at midday. They also drink rice water, *kanji*, if there is not enough rice.

Meals are not family gatherings. Men eat before women and are always served by a woman. People often eat on the veranda or in front of the house. As everywhere in India, only the right hand touches food, the left hand being 'that of excrement'. Belching is not only acceptable but even welcomed. In India, eating is a ritually

problematic operation which has to de done as quickly as possible, hence there is no talking while eating.

The Paraiyars are not vegetarians, yet they eat little meat except on special occasions (festivals, visits, etc.). During the monsoon, children often catch crabs and fish or gather snails. On payday, a man can buy a little dried fish at the market; this is a cause for great rejoicing among the children.

It is known that the Indian castes can be hierarchized according to the meat diet which they follow. The Paraiyars are a caste which eats beef, so that their diet does indeed reflect their position in the hierarchy. Unlike what used to be the case, the Paraiyars do not, however, eat carrion.

The Paraiyars' diet is far from being nutritively satisfying. They do not eat meat regularly, there is no fruit, few vegetables, no sugar, little oil, no bread, no lentils or fat. It is easy to understand the presence of illnesses linked to malnutrition such as temporary blindness. There are no cases of obesity in the village.

If a mother has no milk for breast-feeding her baby, the family often does not have the means of buying powdered milk which would swallow up the larger part of a coolie's wage. Sometimes, therefore, the baby is fed with palm sugar, *kanji* or rice paste. Under such conditions, it is easy to understand why infant mortality is quite high.

5) Dress

The importance of dress in Indian society has sometimes been neglected. It is true that it is impossible to recognize a man's caste by what he wears; however a certain number of privileges and prohibitions were a consequence of hierarchical status. The Brahmans wore, for example, the sacred thread, the Muslims dressed in bright colours while white was the colour of the Hindus.

The Harijans could not dress as they liked. A man could not wear a turban nor cover his chest. The cloth which he tied around his hips could not be worn below the knee. He was forbidden, in addition, to wear shoes or sunglasses, to carry a parasol or an umbrella. Precious metals like gold were also prohibited. Women were forbidden the same accessories and could not wear a blouse under their sari and their breasts had to be visible. The sari could not be worn beneath the knee either. Traditionally, the untouchables received their clothes from their employers and only when their old garments were in rags.

Thus their external appearance reflected the untouchability with which they were burdened.

This discrimination in dress cannot be neglected. It used to be one of the most striking symbols of caste hierarchy and, to put it another way, has been the object of protests made by oppressed castes since the colonial era. It is true to such an extent that the social rise of the Nadars really started with the 'breast cloth controversy', the struggle for Nadar women to be able to cover their breasts (see Jeffrey 1976; Hardgrave 1970).

Today things have changed. At Valghira Manickam, at least, the Paraiyars dress as they wish. Elsewhere, where the Paraiyars depend directly on the high castes, things are of course different and it is, for example, forbidden for Paraiyars to go about wearing shoes in high caste neighbourhoods. However, at Valghira Manickam, people still complain about discrimination: they claim that the parish priest insults them when they wear fine clothes. They also claim that their clothes make the Kallars get beside themselves with anger.

It is the young people who are most conscious of the 'prestige' of fine clothes. Young men over sixteen take pleasure in taking care over their external appearance. They have stylish haircuts, wear multicoloured shirts and heeled sandals while the wealthier ones wear watches.

The girls are less concerned with dress. After puberty, they wear a sari and a blouse. Older women stop wearing blouses. Women wear out their sari until they become rags. They then decide, at last, to wear a new sari. Women wear fake jewellery: nose jewellery, earrings, toe-rings and multicoloured bracelets. The *tâli*, a pendant which is the symbol of marriage, is the only thing of value. Many however do not wear the *tâli*, a thing which, in Tamil Nadu, is considered a great dishonour.

Men's dress is very simple: a dhoti, which is a piece of white cloth tied around the hips, and a Western-style shirt when going outside the village; the lungi (a dhoti with bright colours) is worn in the village or for going to work. It is becoming more and more popular. Unlike their wives, men wear underclothes, that is to say a kind of under-pants which look like shorts. Most of the time, men and women walk barefoot. Some wear plastic sandals which the English call 'flip-flops'.

Despite this simplicity of dress, the Paraiyars are proud of being more respectable than in the past. Their economic condition does not allow them to dress as they would wish to, but they like to make themselves clean especially when they leave the village. It is without doubt an essential sign of their dignity.

D) Conclusion

In this chapter, we have made acquaintance with the village and its inhabitants. One of the striking characteristics of the village is the autonomy it enjoys with respect to the high castes. The proximity of Devakottai is another essential element in the analysis of the village. Finally, it should be noted that the great majority of the village is Catholic.

2. Internal Organization: Authority and Quarrels

The last chapter has allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the village. We have noted the existence of several communities, which are, so to speak, juxtaposed on a common territory. The 'village' concept does not apply therefore to the whole conglomerate settlement, but rather to the different parts which make it up. Indeed there is no one place name which includes the three communities. In this context, we agreed with Dumont and Pocock who considered that the village concept does not transcend caste differences. In this specific case, 'village' should be understood as the local segment of a caste. Hence, the Christian Paraiyars form a certain community which distinguishes them from the other castes. In Chapter One, we also saw that this unity appears in various institutions, like the raising of the flag for the religious festival, mourning, taxes or pride when faced with external aggression. There is thus indeed a certain social solidarity. However, this solidarity remains weak and rarely manages to take on an active form. It stays confined to a few manifestations. Otherwise, this solidarity is very limited and it is this limitation which we are going to discover in this chapter.

The social factor which strikes people from outside the village, when they talk about it, is the division among its members and their inability to undertake common action. We had been warned from every quarter: the Harijans were called 'hopeless', always ready to quarrel or put a spanner in the works of someone who tried to help them. It was said to be impossible to get something good out of them: 'They just do not want to go up!'. In the first chapter, we saw that a closer examination of the village effectively confirmed this hasty judgement: all attempts undertaken to obtain any facility for

the village turned out to be fruitless. Quarrels always stopped the realization of the smallest project and the villagers always proved themselves incapable of uniting in order to make the most of available sources of help (see Chapter One, section 6). In this chapter, I would like to develop the explanations and the general context of this chronic inability. Far from being an anarchy, what can be called the political organization of the Paraiyars seems to me to correspond to a logic which is peculiar to their society. On the one hand, it prevents the development of an internal authority which could, in the long run, compete with external power and, on the other hand, it maintains the equality of the members of their society. Here we are faced with the recurrent theme of this study: the internal organization of the Paraiyars forestalls the development of hierarchy within Paraiyar society itself by maintaining egalitarian structures. If anarchy there is, it is therefore organized, or at least 'functional'.

A) External Power

Paraiyar society should not however be considered autonomous. It should be borne in mind that the Paraiyars in no way constitute an independent society. On the contrary, they are part of a general society and occupy a determined position in caste hierarchy. In addition, they belong today to modern India and this also implies that certain powers are exercised by political, judicial and administrative authorities. Traditional authority (the high castes) and legal and political authority are combined since the high castes predominate in the panchayats and this is also true in political and administrative functions. In addition, it is almost unthinkable that an untouchable candidate could be directly elected in political elections except, of course, to a seat reserved for the untouchables.

In the past, it was the local high caste which had power over the untouchables. In the region this essentially, but not exclusively, meant the Kallars. The Kallars governed the untouchables, assigned them their work and regulated their place in society. If the untouchables broke the laws of this society, it was also the Kallars who repressed them. Kallar authority thus expressed itself in the rules which applied to the workings of society in general and also in the place, role and duties of the Paraiyars in this society. On the other hand, this authority was not limited to these aspects alone since the Kallars also exercised the role of arbitrator in a whole series of internal questions:

they often acted as judges or arbitrators in basic conflicts among the Paraiyars themselves. Any kind of important litigation was resolved by recourse to the Kallars. The fact that the Paraiyars were geographically scattered encouraged their political divisions. Their very hard work left them little time for public activities. They were, in any case, excluded from any decision concerning the village community as a whole. They did not take part in meetings for organizing festivals or managing the temple from which they were excluded. To summarize: the untouchables, who were characterized by a position of absolute dependence on the high castes, also addressed themselves to them in order to resolve their own conflicts. If they tried to resolve a quarrel by themselves, the quarrel went on for ever and it thus became necessary to have recourse to the only accepted authority which was that of their 'superiors'. We shall see that the situation encountered today at Valghira Manickam still resembles in many aspects the reality of the past. Nowadays however, quarrels tend to get worse than used to be the case, since the Kallars' authority over the Paraiyars is less effective and the Paraiyars have started to ignore the opinions of their former masters. In many *cêris* where dependence on the high castes is still real, it is always the high castes who settle most internal litigation. At Valghira Manickam, this is less the case. The villagers still call upon the Kallars for help from time to time, but it is more a question of asking for protection rather than for arbitration. The opposing party will then appeal to another Kallar, an enemy of the first one, in order to provide his defence. This happens from time to time, but the Kallars no longer manage to resolve the conflicts:

> A little after her marriage, Maria Silvam had left her husband who had remarried another woman with whom he spent the rest of his life. When he died, Maria Silvam claimed that she was the only legitimate wife and that she therefore had the right to inherit her husband's goods since he had no children. She appealed to a Kallar from Kanda Devi in order to defend her rights, but the Kallar could only threaten a few villagers without being able to make his protégée's case prevail.

Such interventions are rare and this is understandable. The Kallars no longer have the power to assert themselves in the life of the village. We shall see that they still have certain privileges and a certain authority, but this authority is no longer organic and concerns individual cases.

Before dealing with the Paraiyars' manner of organizing their internal life today, we must say something about their integration into modern India. We have already noted that the Paraiyars only have a vague notion of their social universe. For them, India is an abstract reality which they do not master. On the other hand, Tamil Nadu appears to be their true nation. Anything which is not Tamil is foreign. There is no need to say that the Paraiyars are not very active politically. There is only one active member of a party in the village: a communist who proudly sports a bright red towel on his shoulder. There are also a few sympathizers of political parties: the Congress party and the AIADMK and DMK nationalist parties. Traditionally, the Harijans vote Congress because of the historical struggle in favour of the secularization of the country, but in Tamil Nadu, the question of Tamil nationalism has invaded political life (Walch 1976), and the untouchables are not indifferent to the populist propaganda of the nationalist parties, the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) and the AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) (Béteille 1970a: 286). The villagers' preferences vary according to the day: the state chief minister, M.G. Ramchandran, a former film star popularly known as M.G.R., enjoyed a certain charisma. The other political parties have also begun to present candidates who come from the world of cinema, like Sivaji Ganesan.

The Paraiyars' political consciousness hardly goes beyond 'artistic' considerations. Municipal employees are however active in the unions. Most of them belong to a communist union but this adherence does not express itself at a political level. In the same way, the Hindu Paraiyars are little involved in untouchable militancy which is completely out of the grasp of the Christians. The villagers have two representatives in the panchayat of Kanda Devi. These representatives (a Christian and a Hindu) are not elected but are chosen by the president who is elected. Their role is quite derisory. They do not dare make opposition to the Kallars who predominate the assembly and their presence is purely symbolic. It should however be remembered that the panchayats were dissolved in Tamil Nadu and that they have not functioned for several years.

B) Internal Organization

In the past, the Harijans settled a few questions concerning caste customs by themselves. If they were unable to find a solution, they

could always appeal to the Kallars. Today, as we have just seen, the Kallars have almost completely withdrawn from the public life of the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam. Hence it is the Paraiyars themselves who have taken in hand respect for the rules and customs of the caste, the infliction of sanctions on those guilty of transgressing these rules and the resolution of conflicts. Such is the principle at least; the reality is less perfect. There is no leadership at Valghira Manickam and no structure of competent authority and in consequence this society lives in a kind of state of anomy where conflicts remain unsolved.

1) Leadership

Not only is there no chief of the Christian Paraiyars at Valghira Manickam, the Christian Paraiyars are somewhat allergic to any leadership function. Used, as they are, to receiving orders from on high and from outside, they do not tolerate any kind of authority or power among themselves. It is true that power automatically brings with it inequality (Balandier 1969: 46) and that the social structure of the Paraiyars, as we shall see in the chapters which follow, is essentially egalitarian. In the final chapter, we shall see that none of the religious personalities have any kind of power among the Paraiyars. Indeed, they are even held in contempt or are socially rejected. If one of them becomes well-known, it is outside the borders of the village where 'a prophet hath no honour'. The catechist and his father, the Hindu *pujari* and the exorcist are people of no importance. Their role seems more of an irksome task than a prerogative. The catechist's father who looks after the village's sanctuary is ridiculed by the villagers and if he receives too many favours from the pilgrims, he is made to leave the sanctuary. People are jealous of him and few trust him. If he receives money from the pilgrims, he is bitterly criticized and he is likely to have trouble.

There is no chief (*talaiyâri*) among the Christians. People like to say that, 'Each man is his own chief'. Some villages do indeed have a chief, but his title is a pure formality and carries with it no prerogatives. Such is the case of the Hindu chief who has no real responsibility. If an official or some important person of rank comes to the village, it is perhaps to him that they will be taken, but he has no competence in making decisions or sanctions. His function is a nominal one, and 'he has nothing to say', say the Hindus. Ramanathan, who works in Dubai, would have much more influence

if he lived permanently in the village. But he only comes home every three or four years and then only for a few weeks at a time. It is clear however that he will assert himself as an essential person of rank when he settles again in the village. He is rich (at least as compared to others) and has all the exterior aspects of a high-caste man. I do not know if he will manage to enforce his decisions on the villagers, but it is sure that such a man would have a favourable effect on his community.

Among the Christians, no one has this stature. Arockyam, a young man who works as a salaried employee, is somewhat respected; it is he who keeps the accounts for the religious festival and his honesty is not questioned by the villagers, which is not a small matter, as we shall see later on. However, his authority does not go much further than his abilities as treasurer and organizer. He is himself implicated in personal quarrels and hence does not manage to obtain unanimity. He is not well-off enough to be able to assert himself: power, as Béteille (1966: 173) noted, is above all measured by the ability to spend. Among the Christians, it is true, there are a few men who are more active than others in the village's organization. The villagers offer them no resistance so long as their activity does not let them obtain any material advantage or advantage in status. This is the case, for example, of Sebastian who shows some interest in questions concerning the village.

Men who have reached a reasonably advanced age (according to our estimations, forty to fifty years) are considered to be 'old people' and expect to be present at the important events in the village. Among the Hindus, some of them must be present at a wedding in order to ratify the marriage, but their importance does not go much further. The opposition which divides the young and the old bears witness to the fact that their role is limited. Before investigating the role of the village assembly, I would like to discuss this fact.

2) The Generation Gap

The importance of young people in the life of the village seems to me to be part of this context of opposition to authority. Rivalry between the young and the old appears on many occasions. Young people constitute an important group in the life of the village; though of course unstructured, their influence is none the less omnipresent. There are a few married men who can be considered as being part of the group of young people, but most of the 'young people' are

young men whose ages range from 16 to 25 and who are not yet married. They meet at the parvis of the church, talking for hours and looking at the girls who go to fetch water; they pay a lot of attention to their exterior appearance. It is hard to imagine that these young people, dressed in fashionable shirts, with well-cut hair which is always properly combed, come from such poor families.

Some of them have gone as far as secondary studies. This is the case of Manickam who, without being a real leader, is certainly respected and listened to by all the young people. There are no factions among the young people. Even sons of enemy families meet in the same group and behave as if there were no longer any quarrels. The young people take in hand a number of events in the village. Among other things, they look after the programme of the National Cadet Corps. In this context, they do not hesitate to criticize the indolence and lack of initiative of the old people. They also organize the play for the village's religious festival and occasionally intervene in questions of morality.

> It seems that Selvi, a young girl from the village, often had visits during the night from a young man from Devakottai. The young people could not stand this and they chased the young man from the village. They convened the village in order to make sure that such an indolent attitude would not be displayed again.

The better educated among the young people thus appear more 'Sanskritized' and in this respect they distance themselves even more again from their elders: some are in favour of sterilization, all underline the importance of education and denounce the laxity of their elders, for whom the Harijans should only 'be able to run behind a cow'. Their exterior appearance clearly shows the importance they accord to the villagers' dignity and they are proud to see the village full of colour and music during the days which precede the religious festival.

They sometimes actually oppose the older people, and I was present at a quarrel which ended in blows.

> Before the village festival, young and old had decided to go to the parish priest to talk about finances. The older people did not respond to the invitation and on the appointed day, the young people went alone to the parish. On the way, they came across Valluvan, one of the village's old people, who was drunk as usual. The young people remonstrated, shouting that the old people never did what had been decided. That evening,

Valluvan, still under the influence of drink, went and threatened the young people in front of the church. He raised his hand against Taïnis who pushed him rather abruptly; as Valluvan was drunk, he fell over. The young people protected Taïnis and the matter stopped there.

These altercations do not always end in blows, but they are none the less very frequent. The old people are negligent and do not take to heart village affairs. The young people are, on the contrary, 'the village's future', as they like to say. The opposition between young and old sometimes turns out to the advantage of the young people as is demonstrated by a landmark incident in the life of the village.

A Chettiar from Devakottai owned a brickyard which employed about a dozen people from the village. By praying at the sanctuary of the Virgin Mary, this Chettiar had at last the child he had so long hoped for. By way of thanks, he promised to organize a procession each year in the village. Traditionally, this procession took place the day before the village festival. So the Chettiar used the palanquins, statues and decorations which were employed for the village festival. In 1980, as the old people were getting the statues out of the church, Amalraj, a young married man who was none the less considered as being part of the group of young people, objected with the help of some young people, to the use of the statue of the Virgin and the big palanquin for the Chettiar's festival. His arguments were numerous: the Chettiar was a Hindu, the decoration would be spoilt, etc. Tension ran high between the young people and their elders who, in the majority, wanted the procession to take place as every year. They came to blows. Finally, Ignatius, one of the Chettiar's workers, called the police who put two young people in prison for 24 hours. This intervention was a deciding point. After these events, the village was divided into two camps: on the one side, the 'old' who underlined the prestige of such a procession and who esteemed that the procession was a great good fortune for the village. On the other side, the 'moderns' who found that the young people were right and that the Chettiar should only be allowed to take the small statues (Saint Anthony, Saint Sebastian and Saint Joseph). In the end, the second camp had the upper hand, since the Chettiar's procession did not take place again in 1981 and was probably abandoned forever.

It is clear that there was much more at stake in this debate than the simple question of the procession. For the young people, it was a matter of asserting the independence and the dignity of the village. The partisans of the Chettiar, on the contrary, underlined the importance of tradition, the respect due to such a man, the pride of being

taken in hand by someone from the high caste. No one really expressed the conflict in these terms, but this explanation was latent; the 'victory' of the young people was that of the independence of the village and also the assertion of the dignity of the untouchables. The young people show much less respect to the high castes; the Udayars of Mullikundu complain about this and the Kallars find it difficult to tolerate these young untouchables who resemble their own sons.

The active role of young people seems to me to have been reinforced in the present generation with the development of education and modern changes. None the less, I believe that young people have always had a certain importance. Old age is, in point of fact, not an object of particular veneration among the Paraiyars. Young people soon earn as much money as their parents and they then have more independence. The idea of a 'patriarch' at the head of an extended family is completely foreign to the Paraiyars who do not even tolerate the remarks made by their parents after they marry and settle in another hut. Old people who do not work are a burden and they have to be supported by the young people.

The importance of young people is thus a corollary of the weak centralization of Paraiyar authority. It is only possible in a society where the accent on 'seniority' and authority is weak. The weak social differentiation expresses itself by the absence of domination of the old over the young. Equality among citizens also applies to age. The old hardly have more prerogatives and much less initiative than the young. The young people are in addition less divided by constant quarrelling. This greater solidarity linked to the school education of the Paraiyar youth makes it possible to surmise that they will be able to remain united in a few years time, once they will have taken their parents' place. However, this is far from sure since, once they are married, young people tend to join the established order and take up the quarrels of their parents. It would take a superior personality to be able to assert himself as a respected leader of all. This lack is, in point of fact, one of the major problems of India's untouchables. Since Ambedkar's death, there has no longer been a true untouchable leader.

3) The Village Council

The absence of authority is naturally expressed in the weakness of the village assemblies. In principle, when there is a serious problem

in the village, the victim goes and sees the catechist. At the end of the day, the catechist rings the bell and all the adult males have to congregate at the parvis of the church. Here the two parties express their grievances and their defence, and a decision is taken by unanimous consent. This is the principle. In reality, such meetings are extremely rare. If the catechist rings the bell, few villagers respond to the call and if the matter is serious enough to rouse a large number of villagers, they will never constitute a real tribunal, since inevitably part of the village will be lacking. In addition, the authority of the council is not recognized by anybody and the decision taken will not necessarily be followed by the villagers.

Some recent examples will illustrate this last remark very well. When Valluvan decided to leave his first wife in order to live with another woman by whom he had had a child, the family of the first wife convoked a panchayat. Valluvan was officially ostracized by this assembly but the sanction was never applied; Valluvan even became the village representative at the panchayat assembly of Kanda Devi. In the same way, when another Christian brought home a second wife, the family of the first wife adopted the same procedure. The accused replied to the insults of the villagers by saying that they should look after their own business before looking after his. As a result of a quarrel with the owner of the teashop, the Christians decided not to go there any more, but this decision proved fruitless. Under such circumstances, it is not very useful to have recourse to the village assembly in case of conflict. The sanctions are not put into practice and the decisions are not followed. The parents and friends of the accused will, in any case, contest the legitimacy of the assembly. Since there is no unity, no leadership nor any recognized authority, it is impossible to dispense justice effectively or make people respect customs.

The village council's principal function is thus the organization of the religious festival. Here again, things do not run smoothly. It takes weeks before the catechist can gather together a few men. The major part of the organization is the responsibility of the parish priest and one of the main tasks of the villagers is to levy a tax. Nor is this an easy task. Accusations of embezzlement are thrown around. Those who are absent accuse those in charge of the worst kinds of dishonesty and it takes all the diplomacy of Arockyam, the treasurer, to finally calm everybody down.

In 1981, things took a remarkable turn. The villagers underlined with pride that, for once, there had been no quarrel of importance.

The lack of leadership, the questioning of the authority of the elders, the lack of a judicial body and the inability to apply sanctions explain the fragmentation of Paraiyar society; these also explain why the Paraiyars have few religious dogmas, few absolute principles and few rites which are followed by everyone. We shall see that patrilateral marriage with a cross-cousin reinforces this social anarchy by only uniting families by twos. The whole social structure is opposed to centralization and the nuclear family is the only mode of life which is acceptable to the Paraiyars.

C) Jealousy and Quarrels

In the final analysis, Paraiyar society is opposed to any kind of internal hierarchizing. Jealousy and its social consequences, i.e. constant quarrelling, are what maintain the existing social structure.

The Paraiyars are easily jealous; this is no secret for anybody and they admit it themselves. We have already seen with what energy they oppose anyone who tries to rise socially. If someone obtains a favour, he is usually in for trouble:

> One day, Sebastian was allowed by the manager of the O.T.W. project to build a hut on the land of the brickyard. This provoked a general uproar. Either all the workers were to have a piece of land or Sebastian was to go away. It was the second solution which was adopted in the end.

Again, people say that if somebody earns a lot, he automatically becomes the object of jealousy. In Tamil society, the 'evil eye' is a redoubtable influence and this is also the case in the village: it is not done to say that an object or a child is beautiful. This can bring on serious problems since people are afraid that the object or the baby will be touched by some kind of misfortune. Pregnant women, babies, new buildings, young girls, in short anything which could be the object of envy is capable of being struck by the evil eye.

When envy becomes uncontrollable, the use of black magic is the ultimate solution. It is used in particular against happy parents, well-off tradesmen, assiduous and well-paid workers, in brief all those who attract envy. In addition, it is often members of the family who use black magic. The case of Sowryamman is particularly enlightening:

She was rich at the time. She worked with her husband as a municipal scavenger. They were happy and she was very active. Her family could not put up with it. One day, while she was asleep on the veranda of her house, someone she could not recognize came close to her and covered her body with a white powder. Sowryamman could no longer move. She wanted to cry out, but the words did not come out of her mouth. She remained asleep several days and was ill during many months. She was unable to work and her nephew took over her job at the municipality. She suspects her jealous brothers of having used this means to deprive her of her job.

When a couple does not live together, the explanation made is usually that of black magic as well. Black magic seems to bring happy and prosperous people back to the condition of all Paraiyars. But in general, I found that the Paraiyars only use black magic moderately. There are no specialists (*mantravâdi*) in the village, but there are many in Devakottai.

Jealousy manifests itself more regularly in the numerous accusations of theft. As soon as someone handles money which is not his own, he is accused of 'filling his own pockets', so to speak. The catechists are particularly subject to these accusations which are not always groundless. The Paraiyars know themselves well enough to understand that it would be a mistake not to help oneself when the opportunity to round off one's weekly earnings presents itself. At each religious festival, the catechist is reminded that he caught leprosy because he took too much money from the sanctuary's collection-box and that he will end up by leaving his fingers there: claims which are as cruel as they are unjustified, to my way of thinkion. Women, rightly in this case, often accuse their husbands of keeping money for their personal pleasure. In brief, in questions of money, a Paraiyar does not even trust his own father and suspicion arises over the smallest monetary transaction.

Thus it is the inherent jealousy within Paraiyar society which is at the root of the countless quarrels which divide the village. It is fruitless to try and establish a typology of these quarrels. They are of every kind and form. However there do exist quarrels which are not really deep-seated: the quarrels of everyday life. They do not have to involve people who are 'enemies', even though they can make people's lives a misery. Generally speaking, they do not last long, but they are very frequent. Examples are: a neighbour's cow which comes and drinks in a family's reserves of water, a child who

beats another child. This is a cause of frequent quarrelling and occasional shouts and insults which are part of the 'daily landscape'. When these small quarrels become numerous, they can degenerate into more important ones. The two parties become enemies, that is to say they no longer speak to each other unless it be for quarrelling at regular intervals.

Each family thus has a certain number of enemy families, among whom are to be found related families. It would thus be possible to draw a map of the allegiances and quarrels of each family. A fair number of families do not speak to their neighbours, to the father's brother, etc. The situation is even more striking when one considers the fact that these families often live a few metres from each other. For example, Anthony and Susse are two brothers who share the paternal house. One occupies the right side, the other the left, since the house has only one room. They do not speak to each other and live, with their respective families, a completely independent existence. The quarrel has lasted for many years and nothing seems to come and settle matters since there is no institution for resolving conflicts. Such cases are very frequent. The five Hindu brothers who built a hut on their father's plot of land are also enemies and no longer speak to one another. Such quarrels extend to the whole family: the wives do not speak to one another either and the children have to follow their parents' example.

The causes of these endemic quarrels are multiple. They can arise from an accumulation of small quarrels. If two families no longer get on very well, one then 'forgets' to invite the other family for a ceremony and the rupture is consummated. The worst insult is not to go to a relative's funeral. In this case, the rupture is definitive and the insult is never forgotten. This is what happened between a man from the reservoir and his sisters: they did not come to his son's funeral. The same thing is happening between Kâlimuttu and his brothers: the families have been having petty squabbles about a cow and about Kâlimuttu's wife's attitude. The families hardly speak to each other. Kâlimuttu's daughter is of marriageable age. Her father has already started negotiations to which he has not made his brothers a party. It is a sign of a complete rupture.

As one can easily imagine, questions of inheritance are a constant source of quarrelling. It is true that there is little to inherit, but this little is held to be the apple of one's eyes. Since the rules of

inheritance are ill-defined, an elder son can, for example, lay hold of the better part of his parents' belongings. Things do not always go so far, but a metre of land can become the object of endless conflicts which sometimes grow violent.

Quarrelling among brothers is, as a result, a frequent occurrence. Two brothers inevitably become rivals for the paternal inheritance and conflict immediately ensues. There are no families where there are several sons without at least one quarrel. Pragasan looked after his sister when she was seriously ill. She remained several years at his home; when she died, her brothers claimed their part of the few pieces of gold jewellery she owned. Pragasan refused to give them, since he alone had nursed his sister and so his brothers broke off their relation with him. The neighbourhood is also a source of conflict: a Pallar planted his hedge on the wrong side of the line which separated his plot of land from his neighbour's: a violent outburst was the result. Fear of being wronged and jealousy are thus the explanation of these constant quarrels.

When two people are no longer on speaking terms, they ignore each other completely, but the conflict can come to the surface for the slightest of reasons. This results in much shouting, screaming, threats, tears and blows. Usually speaking, the blows are not very violent: just touching someone is enough for people to speak of 'giving a beating' or 'severe blows'. Such quarrels evidently take place in public. As soon as shouting begins, the villagers realize that something serious is happening. Everybody leaves what he is doing and races to the scene of the quarrel; the show is on, so to speak. No one ever tries to calm the opponents down, people just watch. Nobody intervenes, unless the blows become really violent. Intervening means taking sides and it is better to let others wash their dirty linen in public while making the most of the show. After the first blow, the adversaries, their wives and their allies all start screaming. The scene has to be seen to be believed. Everybody screams even louder and no one listens to the others; people hammer on their chests, as we would hammer on the table in our countries. The women hurl the crudest insults they know, and their knowledge is extensive. The onlookers watch half amused and comment among themselves.

It is striking to note that no one intervenes in these fights. This shows us yet again the inability of the Paraiyars to settle their conflicts. Another striking and significant characteristic is the absence

of real factions or even collective conflicts. The quarrels, though numerous, are almost exclusively individual. Even in adversity, the Paraiyars are not able to unite and the factions which are to be encountered in Indian villages (see Lewis 1955: 158) are completely unknown here. Once again, we are dealing with a clear proof of the fragmentation of Paraiyar society where any kind of unity is reduced to a minimum. Thus, quarrels establish themselves between two families just as, inversely marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin tends to unite families by twos (see Needham 1962). In addition, it is frankly recommended not to involve oneself in other people's quarrels in order not to worsen the situation. If a woman is beaten by her husband, nobody intervenes despite the severe 'beating' which is sometimes meted out to the woman. Cases where the villagers show solidarity in quarrels are infrequent. I can only think of one: it is the story of a man who refused to demolish his house because it was supposed to be in the way of the procession. Most of the villagers were furious with the man and some were particularly enraged. The man claimed that they were jealous to see that he was well-off. At any rate, one day a group of villagers destroyed the hut and some even went to prison because of the incident.

Quarrels hold a fundamental place in the life of the Paraiyars. Every man eats his heart out because of one or a number of quarrels which periodically come to the surface when things get too much to bear again. Quarrels are transmitted from one generation to another. Some no longer even know why they quarrel with someone else. Every family is divided, and sometimes even completely broken up, because of these destructive quarrels. It is a fundamental element of the social structure of the Paraiyars. Quarrels generate and reinforce divisions, prevent the formation of larger social units and any kind of authority. Inversely, in a relentless dialectic, the lack of authority and centralization prevents any resolution of conflict and any code of values recognized by all.

D) Conclusions

Quarrelling is a fundamental institution among the Paraiyars because it prevents the centralization of authority. Traditionally, the Paraiyars did not need real authority among themselves because their life was essentially regulated from outside. They were part of an extremely hierarchized society and their internal social structure, which was

deeply egalitarian, compensated, in a small way, the submission which was imposed from outside. Today, this domination by the high castes, as we shall see in the following chapters, has been strongly undermined, but the Paraiyars have shown themselves unable to substitute internal forms of authority.

3. The Art of Subsistence: Valghira Manickam's Economy

A) Questions of Method

The first chapter has already shown us that Valghira Manickam is far from being self-sufficient. Most produce is bought outside the village and, in addition, the Paraiyars are employed outside most of the time. Thus the village does not have a closed economy since, as we said in the preceding chapter, Valghira Manickam is basically centred on the exterior. This exteriority is reinforced by the almost complete lack of agricultural property in the village. The villagers own almost no land and hence are unable to produce what they need economically. A second consequence of the lack of land is that the villagers constitute, in general, a salaried workforce which only owns its capacity to work. In addition, the economy is almost completely monetary. It is only during the harvest season that the Paraiyars receive wages in kind, but this is simply a few measures of grain.

If we were to describe the village's economy in a word, it would be that of 'subsistence' or 'poverty'. There is no doubt about this, and the Paraiyars are part of the poorest sectors of Indian society. In a recent article, Etienne (1980) clearly showed that it is difficult to quantify poverty. The many studies written on the subject are often very unsatisfactory and are based on a lot of approximations. Such is the case, for example, of one of the few studies concerning the economic conditions of the Harijans of Tamil Nadu (Vagiswari 1972). The author says nothing of the methods he has used in order to obtain his very precise figures on income, spending and debt among the untouchables of Tamil Nadu. The anthropologist knows better than

anyone else how difficult it is to put in terms of figures the material life of populations. As Etienne says, 'any attempt at quantifying food is more or less doomed at the outset, unless one were to weigh, for several days, what the subjects eat' (1980: 286). But there is also another aspect. For day-labourers, it is extremely difficult to know the number of days worked. How many days a week does a coolie work? The question is not easy to answer, all the more so since this number varies according to the season. During certain months, the workers of Valghira Manickam practically do not work, and suffer much more than during the months when work is plentiful. As far as expressing income, spending and debt in figures goes, the difficulties are even greater. The villagers often know nothing of these data. They are incapable of knowing the number of days worked, the amount of their debt or their spending. Sometimes, even if they know these figures, they are not always desirous of revealing the information, either because they have a vested interest in hiding the truth, or because they are afraid that their replies might be used in some way which could do them harm. Debts are thus minimized or exaggerated according to the effect that it is hoped to make. Again, if a Paraiyar is asked how many bricks he makes per day, he will invariably give the maximum number of bricks he is able to produce and not the average number. If this number is multiplied by the number of days worked, a highly exaggerated figure is obtained. In the same way, when a coolie is asked how much he earns, the reply is invariably ten rupees per day, but here again, this is a maximum amount which in fact is seldom attained. This is not however the last difficulty to be listed. I heard a man say that he earned seven rupees at a farm, while his wife told me the same day that he only earned five. A woman, who employed coolies to work on her fields, told me that she had given them four rupees per day, while one of the woman workers claimed that she had only received three and a half. When an anthropologist spends a number of months in a village, it is possible to overcome some of these obstacles, as we shall see later. He comes into contact, day after day, with the villagers and detects the contradictions in his data; he attempts to resolve them and, if he is unable to do this, remains conscious of the limits of his results. The investigator, who gathers such figures during a visit which lasts a few hours, does not even realize perhaps that the villagers give him precise figures in order to please him, or to be left in peace, or

to obtain some favour. At the beginning of my stay, several villagers solemnly claimed that they owned no land, but a few months later they could hardly deny that the land they were tilling belonged to them. It is hard not to smile when one thinks that certain hastily prepared studies have greatly influenced very official reports of the big international organizations which estimate poverty in percentages up to one decimal point. As Etienne says again, there is no need to use a computer to realize the full scope of the problem. Extreme physical poverty is indeed an objective reality. It is necessary only to open one's eyes to see it. This economist gives credit to the methods of the social anthropologist, saying about the poverty of the untouchables:

> However, what estimations can be made of their income? Eyes and observation, in a word, contact, are much more revealing than figures gathered in an abstract fashion' (ibid.: 285).

The anthropological approach thus goes further than a simple statistical inquiry. Beyond the figures, it tries to understand the mechanisms and capture the point of view of the subjects and their actual experience. It is not a question of demonstrating here that the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam are situated in the lowest x per cent of Indian society. Their poverty is almost like initial data. It is enough to live with them to see what their scanty food is, to know their daily wretchedness, their frustrations, the futility of their income and their spending. It seems more interesting, on the other hand, to see how this poverty is lived out and what its mechanisms are. To ask: what does work for the Paraiyars consist of? Does the situation of the past evolve towards better forms? Unlike the purely statistical data of traditional economics, anthropological analysis allows one to attain deeper realities.

B) Traditional Occupations

The twentieth century has witnessed a great shock to the traditional structures of Indian society. The introduction of private property, the intensive commercialization of agriculture, monetization and the development of administrative authorities have been the undeniable influences of British colonization in India. Against what certain simplistic points of view would wish us to believe, the effects of colonization have not been solely negative. Marx himself was not

wrong (n.d.: 42), since he underlined the 'social revolution' which resulted from the contact of India with Western civilization. The term 'revolution' is perhaps exaggerated since the basic structures of the caste society did not disappear and even adapted quite well to the development of capitalism. This does not mean however that Indian society remained completely static. Many castes took advantage of the new possibilities which opened up to them, and some seized the opportunity in order to considerably ameliorate their economic position and/or their social status. Cases of such changes are very numerous. In South India, the case of the Nadars of Tamil Nadu should be noted in particular. This is an almost untouchable caste the status of which has considerably improved since the last century, not however without a bitter struggle by the whole caste (Hardgrave 1970). The case of the Izhavas of Kerala is perhaps even more remarkable since this caste, which used to be despised, has forged for itself an excellent position in Malayali society (Aiyappan 1965).

It is true that, at the very bottom of the hierarchy, the untouchable castes who have greatly improved their status are far and few between. However, the modern era has had at least two good consequences for the Harijans. Firstly, the discriminations of which they were victims have been strongly attenuated during the last century. Untouchability has been officially abolished in India, which wishes to be a secular State. It is true that this constitutional abolition is not enough to get rid of this wrong, but there has been clear progress compared with the horrors of the past. Such horrors still take place, without any doubt, but these are extreme cases. Thus the untouchables have been freed of part of their ills. Today they can freely take buses and trains, use the roads and wear the clothes they wish. Things are far from perfect, but the situation has certainly got better. Secondly, the untouchables have made the most of colonization by occupying positions which used to be forbidden to them. Already at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the abbé Dubois (1906: 52) noted that many 'pariahs', as he calls them, worked as servants in European families and hence improved their economic position.

In the same way, Patwardhan (1973: 21) underlines the fact that they enlisted in the Indian army. Thanks to European liberal thinking, a new wind blew over Indian society and untouchability became the target of a number of reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj. Some untouchables were able to climb the social ladder (see, on this

subject, Isaacs 1964), among them their great leader Ambedkar who, thanks to a study grant from the Raja of Baroda, obtained a doctorate from an American university (Lynch 1972) and became minister in Nehru's first government. But this is a famous exception, and the great mass of the untouchables remained compelled to perform the hardest tasks. None the less, it is this liberalization which explains the present-day structure of employment in our village. The traditional position of the untouchables has been completely altered and we have seen that the village itself is the fruit of recent changes, since it is solely made up of untouchables. In addition, part of the villagers have been able to take advantage of the new opportunities which modern society offers and occupy salaried positions. The majority, it is true, continue to supply the major part of manual labour, but here again the changes are noteworthy since, on the one hand, their work is remunerated in money and, on the other hand, they are practically independent of any kind of caste obligation: the untouchables of Valghira Manickam no longer have to provide the usual services in favour of the high castes, but it should be remembered that this is a sort of special case.

There has been no real 'proletarianization' of the untouchables since they have not lost the means of production they never possessed. In many cases, it is the contrary which has taken place since a certain number of untouchables have been able to acquire land. On the other hand, the liberation of the untouchables is not a vain word. During the pre-British period, the untouchables lived in a state of 'semi-slavery' (Saradamoni 1980). They could not leave the village to which they were attached. Today this situation, albeit illegal, still exists of course, but along with it a large number of untouchables have freed themselves from the yoke of the high castes and the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam are among them. However, as we saw in the last chapter, they occupy a rather privileged position in the region. Most of the other Paraiyar villages are multi-caste and the Paraiyars are therefore dependent on the high castes for their subsistence. They have to provide ritual tasks, as well as various tasks of the nature of clearing refuse and emptying cesspools. In these more traditional villages, submission and dependence are however less pronounced than used to be the case and it is easier to free oneself from the village. This is what Vedamattu, a native of Kilyur, explains:

This village is made up of 200 Udayar families and 150 Paraiyar[2] families. The Paraiyars, Vedamattu tells us, still depend a lot on the Udayars especially if they have borrowed money from them. Some Paraiyar families, the poorest, work for the Udayars for a miserable wage (four rupees per day for the men and only two rupees for the women). But here also the Paraiyars enjoy a certain freedom since they can, for example, leave the village and look for work elsewhere. Some are, however, tied to an Udayar family having borrowed money from them.

As we have no firsthand information on this subject, we shall not pursue this and shall simply say that Valghira Manickam is a rather unique case since the Paraiyars live in relative independence.

It is possible to have a reasonably clear idea of the system in which the Paraiyars used to live before coming to Valghira Manickam. Traditionally, the economy of the Indian village functioned according to a system which anthropologists have called jajmani. The jajmani system is a particular kind of division of labour between the castes who own land and the so-called service castes which are tied by a relation of hereditary services and which are remunerated annually in the form of a fixed quantity of an agricultural product. It constitutes a system of reciprocal service which unites all the members of the village (see Epstein 1967: 230). A carpenter, for example, is obliged to make and maintain the agricultural tools of the peasants; in exchange, he receives at each harvest, as the sole form of payment, a quantity of grain which is hereditarily fixed.

It goes without saying that this quantity was not the same for all the castes. A carpenter received, for example, a much more substantial amount than a tanner. Obviously, the untouchables were at the bottom of the ladder. They provided the major part of the agricultural workforce of the village and were in addition obliged to fulfil various functions of a religious or social nature: they were often the night-watchmen of the village, the scavengers, gravediggers, sweepers and drummers at funerals. They were often attached to a particular family, sometimes to such an extent that in Uttar Pradesh, for example, Wiser states that an untouchable was not called by his own name, but by that of his master. 'He is the Chamar of so-and-so' (Wiser and Wiser 1969: 41) is said of an untouchable of the Chamar caste. Anthropological writings have sometimes exaggerated the social harmony which resulted from this system of 'reciprocal obligations'.

[2]This is of course an approximation.

However, this perfect integration did not work for the untouchable whose wage was the lowest. Sometimes, he was obliged to beg for his wage or only received the high castes' leftovers. The utter poverty in which the untouchables lived struck all observers. In the sixteenth century, Duarte Barbosa (1970: 143) already noted the terrible conditions in which the Pulayas and Paraiyars of Kerala lived (see also Saradamoni 1980: 44–70). Agricultural labourers barely had enough to subsist on. Their condition, A.K. Iyer (1981, 1: 91) tells us, was that of cattle. They could be bought or sold. The murder of an untouchable was not considered to be a serious offence.

It is in similar conditions that the ancestors of the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam lived. We saw in the last chapter that a few untouchable families were 'attached' to a village of which they constituted the agricultural workforce. This situation can still be observed in many villages in Tamil Nadu. The untouchables' work can be summarized by the Tamil expression *adimai thozil* (literally 'slave work') as the Paraiyars call it today. The Paraiyars, like the other major untouchable castes, had to provide the main part of agricultural work for the high castes. In the area, the castes were principally those of the Kallars, Maravars, Vellalars, Udayars, etc. Alongside agricultural work, the *adimai thozil* also consisted of a series of tasks concerning scavenging and knackery: they had to keep the village clean, collect human and animal nightsoil, keep watch over the fields and gather dead cattle which they could use for themselves. These tasks are ritually unclean since they deal with organic waste and only the untouchables can fulfil them. They were thus the servants (or slaves, *adimai*) of the village. They were also the messengers of the village, and when it was necessary to spread news in the neighbouring villages, a Paraiyar or another untouchable was sent to do it. Along with these services, the Paraiyars were obliged to fulfil another series of tasks, this time of a ritual nature.

Traditionally, the Paraiyars were drummers. The very name 'Paraiyar' is derived from the name of a big drum called '*parai*'. They did not play drums at any time and place, but principally at funerals in order to chase away the evil spirits. The Paraiyars were excluded from auspicious events like weddings. It was also the Paraiyars or Pallars who dug graves for the dead, which again was a task held in contempt. The same is the case for the other tasks undertaken by the Paraiyars. The people whom the inhabitants of Valghira Manickam

call *ûr* Paraiyars (Paraiyars attached to a village, *ûr*) accomplish all the ritually 'polluting' tasks of the village. Drums are themselves inferior objects since they are made with animal skins, often cow-skin. The *ûr* Paraiyars are also called *tooti* or scavengers and their position is a very low one. This inferiority is expressed in all caste relationships. We shall have the opportunity to see in the next chapter the many and various discriminations of which the untouchables are victims: they are prohibited from wearing clothes, shoes, covering their head, using roads, entering the villages, touching caste people, entering temples; they are obliged to show certain signs of respect and remain humble, etc.

It is therefore hardly surprising that the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam are extremely sensitive about such questions. They claim to refuse any of the *adimai thozil* tasks, unless, they say, they are decently paid. For example, no untouchable would nowadays wish to accomplish these functions for the Udayar village of Mullikundu. At Valghira Manickam, drums are also scorned and nobody plays or owns one today. There is only one old man who belonged to a drum orchestra, but this is no longer the case. Despite this, I was surprised that regardless of these observations, the Paraiyars still know how to play drums: at the festival, young men often have fun by borrowing a drum from the orchestra during the procession. There are still Paraiyars who form village orchestras, like the one from Kilyur which played at Valghira Manickam's festival. However, these orchestras no longer play as servants of the village. They are semi-professionals who ask payment for their performances.

None the less, there is a clear tendency to reject this traditional occupation. It has too great a connotation of shame to be acceptable still. In the Ramnad district, not a year goes by without certain *ûr* Paraiyars refusing not only to play drums for the high castes, but also to accomplish the unpaid traditional tasks for the castes they used to serve in the past. This progressive emancipation is, to be sure, not yet finished, but it is a clear tendency which can be observed in rural India. The untouchables, who have freed themselves from this servitude, do not always improve their economic position considerably. The system was able to provide a certain economic security for the untouchables (Epstein 1973: 140). None the less, its disappearance provides them with greater freedom and opens up to them new possibilities as the village of Valghira Manickam shows us.

The traditional economic system is thus characterized by a total dependence of the untouchables on the high castes. The Paraiyars were dependent on them from every point of view. They were tied to the high castes and could do nothing without them. Their very movements were controlled by their masters and they did not even have money to buy what they needed. The master gave them some fabric to clothe themselves and grain to feed themselves. They possessed nothing else, had few rights but many obligations. Their emancipation took place slowly. In the untouchable colonies where there was sufficient manpower, a few families were able to seize the new economic opportunities provided by modern society. Some even left India to go and work in Burma, Singapore or Malaysia whence they came back with a little money. Others, the greater number, learnt a trade, some studied, emigrated to the towns, entered the administrative services, etc., so that little by little, the situation was modified, even if some remained untiringly in the village fulfilling the same tasks as their ancestors. Today, the majority of untouchables have not become economically independent in the strong sense of the word. Most of the time, they do not own the means of production and are hired daily on a contractual basis. However they are often no longer dependent on *one* caste as in the past, their ritual obligations are less strong, they can choose new employers and go where they wish. The distinction is important: the Kallars of Kanda Devi, as we shall have the opportunity to see later on, still deem that they have rights over the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam, but the latter do not always see things this way and avoid as much as possible the obligations which the Kallars would like to maintain. Dependence is reinforced when the high castes lend money to the Harijans, or a little land as is the case in our village. Some families are then obliged to go and work at their creditors' for wages below average, but this is no longer an institutionalized relationship between the two communities and most of them escape this situation. Despite their assertions, I suspect that some villagers still work without wages for the Kallars of Kanda Devi in order to get rid of a debt; but these are isolated cases. Today the village is independent. The inhabitants can go and live where they want, work for whom they wish and when they wish. This is notable progress even if incomes have not really improved in a kindred fashion. Finally, at Valghira Manickam, the emancipation of labour goes together with an economy which has become almost

completely monetary, and with access to new economic positions. It is the present-day structure of the Paraiyars' economy which will be our subject for the rest of this chapter.

C) The Principal Trades

1) Modern and Traditional Sectors

From the point of view of employment, the active population of the village can be divided into two categories: on the one hand, the day labourers who have remained in the traditional sectors of the economy, mainly brick-making, agricultural labour and working as coolies. This first category constitutes the majority of the village. The second category includes those who have been able to seize the new economic possibilities and who work either as employees (municipal sweepers, electricians, white-collar workers, etc.), or are self-employed (masons, cart-drivers, etc.). This second category thus constitutes a sector of activity which used to be practically inaccessible to the untouchables until recently—say a good fifty-odd years ago. In this context, one can see that the changes have been real at Valghira Manickam, though it is necessary to underline the privileged nature of the village which is situated in the immediate vicinity of a small town. It is indeed because of this that a large number of people with qualifications, or skilled workers, come and settle uxorilocally in the village of Valghira Manickam. As a result, the proportion of workers in this new sector would doubtless be lower in more isolated villages. None the less, even at Valghira Manickam, they only constitute a quarter of the active population, as is shown by Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of the active population of Valghira Manickam according to sectors of activity

Sector	Community		
	Christians	Hindus	Total
Traditional	159 (75.4%)	33 (66%)	192 (74%)
Modern	52 (24.6%)	17 (34%)	69 (26%)
Total	211 (100%)	50 (100%)	261 (100%)

The table shows clearly that it is the traditional sector which remains the majority. It is however necessary to analyse the table diachronically, as we suggested in the last section. The modern sector is not necessarily the true 'sector of the future', albeit a falsely enticing one. Although young people hope to undertake a career in it, the possibilities are extremely limited, while this is not the case in the traditional sector: young intellectuals who have secondary-school qualifications are often obliged to work in the brickyards after several years of inactivity during which they vainly try to find employment in the sector which pleases them and which corresponds to their qualifications. On the other hand, there is always enough work in brick-making to occupy, as it does, the majority of the population. In addition, as we shall see later on, the modern sector is not synonymous with wealth. In many cases it does not correspond to material advancement. Although there is much more prestige attached to working in a printer's workshop than carrying bricks on one's head, the wages are lower. However, professions in the modern sector are often less arduous than those of the traditional sector where working conditions are extremely harsh. After social prestige, this is the second reason which explains why these modern professions hold a certain attraction. Among these, there are some which, in addition, are also attractive from a material standpoint: municipal scavengers, employees of the water department, the electricity board and public transport as well as white-collar workers, among salaried jobs and masons and cart-drivers, among the self-employed, all have enviable incomes. This appears notably in the fact that the wives of these workers no longer work. Access to these professions is very restricted. Table 4 shows that 43 persons occupy such positions (columns 3 to 8), that is 16 per cent of the active population. However, as wives no longer work in these cases, the economic situation of the families concerned is not that much better, apart from a few cases like that of the railway employee who earns 900 rupees per month, or that of the two Hindus who work at Dubai. Here the families are better off than those of the scavengers who earn around 350 rupees per month. We shall deal with the question of income in the following sections and we must now come back to the question of the different professions.

Table 4 gives the details of the different professions to be found at Valghira Manickam. The active population represents more than

Table 4: Distribution of the active population of Valghira Manickam by profession

Community		Profession											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Christians	M	61	5	8	5	1	2	8	3	12	3	–	4
	F	68	25	2	–	–	2	–	–	1	–	–	1
Total		129	30	10	5	1	4	8	3	13	3	–	5
Hindus	M	10	–	–	–	6	–	3	3	1	–	4	–
	F	17	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total		27	6	–	–	6	–	3	3	1	–	4	–
Grand total		156	36	10	5	7	4	11	6	14	3	4	5

1 Brick-making
2 Coolie
3 Scavenger
4 Electricity/water
5 Bus/train/taxi
6 White-collar
7 Mason
8 Cart-driver
9 Printer/workshop
10 Shop
11 Restaurant
12 Servant

45 per cent of the total population owing to the fact that most of the women in the village work. It is clear that these figures are only an approximation and that there is always a certain margin of error to be taken in consideration. For example, some women whose husbands are well-paid claim to work, but infrequently. I was able to observe that in fact these women almost never worked, and it would be erroneous to include them in the table. On the other hand, pregnant coolies would say that they did not work, but this was because of their condition, and so a few months later they were working again. I have thus had to readjust the table somewhat, but the adjustments are minor and in no way modify its general nature.

The traditional sector is represented by columns 1 and 2. There is little difference between them. The majority of coolies are women, but a large number of men, who work in the brickyards, are in fact coolies since they do not know how to make bricks and simply help their wives. In the same way, a certain number of women coolies work for the most part in the brickyards. Finally, all the people in these two columns become agricultural labourers during the rainy season when brick-making is finished. In other words, they are all seasonal workers. In order to obtain the number of agricultural

labourers, one has simply to add these two columns, giving the number of workers in the traditional sector. We have already seen that columns 3 to 8 represent envied employment. This is not the case of columns 9 to 12 which cover badly-paid labour, often less than a hundred rupees per month. Many of these jobs are held by young people with education who do not wish to work as coolies or in the brickyards. They will probably end up doing so once they found a family, unless, like the four Hindus who work in restaurants in Bangalore and Madras, they leave their wives and family to fend for themselves in the village.

2) Division of Labour by Gender

This naturally brings us to consider the work of women. It is striking to observe that women represent almost half (47 per cent) of the active population. This is truly remarkable if one takes into account the fact that, in the high non-agricultural castes, most women do not work. Here, not only do they work as much as the men do, but they are a huge majority in the traditional sector, since of the 192 workers in this sector, 116 are women which represents 60 per cent of the total of this sector. In addition, these 116 women constitute 95 per cent of the female active population as is shown by Table 5. It is thus surprising to see that women accomplish the most important economic tasks of the village. This statistical dominance is further reinforced if one takes into account qualitative data: as I said before, it is women who, most of the time, make bricks and who, in addition, accomplish important tasks while the men go and drink tea. This last remark should not be overstressed: men work hard as well; they are not idle fellows who live off the work of the women, but it is undeniable that women work even harder, all the more so since the greater part of the housework is also incumbent on them. The importance of women's work can be noted in the fact that they have a specific bodily technique: only women are able to make bricks standing up, their legs stretched and the bust leaning forward. This position is also essential for agricultural work. Men are unable to work for eight hours in this way. When they make bricks, they do so squatting, which is a much less mobile position. This is one of the reasons which contributes to the greater speed of women in brick-making. Finally, in agriculture, a high number of essential tasks such as weeding and planting out are done by women. These tasks are traditionally the prerogative of women and for many weeks they are the only ones

who earn the family's living since men do not find work. In addition, in building work, as in all coolie work, women are preferred to men since their wages are much lower: a woman only receives four to five rupees per day against eight to ten for men. From what we have just seen, it is not the difference in productivity which justifies such a great difference in earnings.

Table 5: Distribution of the active population by gender and sector of activity

Sector	Gender		
	Men	Women	Total
Traditional	76 (54.7%)	116 (95.0%)	192 (74%)
Modern	63 (45.3%)	6 (5.0%)	69 (26%)
Total	139 (100%)	122 (100%)	261 (100%)

Hence there is only a minute percentage of women working in the modern sector. Among these, there are two women who work as scavengers and earn money for the family. Another one works in the kitchens of the De Britto school and earns less than three rupees per day. There is an educated young woman who is employed as a workwoman at a printer's, also for a very low wage, although both of these women are the teachers of the balwadi school who earn less than fifty rupees a month. It is therefore men who work in the new sectors, since 45 per cent of them have left the traditional sector. This can be explained by the observation that it is men who hold authority among the Paraiyars and they prefer to choose easier tasks, such as working in restaurants, for wages well below what can be earned in brick-making (often less than a hundred rupees). In the same way, men, in general, go to school longer than women and a certain number of jobs are reserved to them; this is the case of men who work in public transport (bus, train, taxi) and in teaching or for the water and electricity boards. No women become cart-drivers or masons. As a coolie, a woman can continue to breast-feed her children, which is not the case in salaried employments like those of the municipality. Women are thus more confined to traditional occupations than men. The fact that they are less oriented towards public life and fashionable clothing than young men, a situation which we described in the last chapter, shows the modernism of men;

young women of the same age are more conventional and are too occupied by their various tasks to spend much time on their appearance.

I mentioned above that it is also men who hold authority and this evidently affords them a greater freedom of choice. For example, a man can decide to go and work in a restaurant in Madras and earn 75 to 100 rupees a month while his wife continues to make bricks in the village. The contrary would be utterly unthinkable. The will to leave the traditional sector appears again among young people: the twelve boys of column 9 (printers, etc.) are employed as workmen in workshops or factories and are also underpaid, often less than a hundred rupees a month. They could earn more by making bricks like the young women of their age. It is true that they hope to be able to better their condition in this way, even though their hopes are often dashed. Let us note simply that it is 'normal' for a young man of 18 to be unemployed or work for ridiculously low wages; young women of the same age do not have as much freedom. This difference appears even more strikingly among the Pallars of Pani Pulan Vayal. I did not undertake an exhaustive enquiry in this community, but a noteworthy characteristic, which I was able to observe there, is the fact that, in many cases, men did not work or at least almost not. There were a certain number of families where the father was almost completely inactive: some claimed to be possessed or ill, but the fact of not working was undeniable. It these families, the woman worked as well as one or another child. The Pallars, who are often cart-drivers, are doubtless a little better off and they sometimes own a little land. The Harijans content themselves with little in order to live, and as soon as the bare minimum is guaranteed, they no longer see any interest in killing themselves with work under a blazing sun. We saw that the contrary is also true when a man has a job which pays well: among the Paraiyars, the wives of men with good wages do not work, and this is often the case among the Pallars, in families where the father is a cart-driver. Brick-making and coolie work is very exhausting and this explains why people try and avoid it as far as possible.

If one follows some Marxists (for example, Meillassoux 1975: 116), the question arises of knowing if women are 'exploited' by men. The reply depends perhaps on what is meant by 'exploited', but it seems to me that such a concept is exaggerated in the context

in question. The relationship between men and women is not purely contractual. There exists between them a bond of love, or, at any rate, of affection which means that this relationship cannot be simply reduced to commercial terms. In addition, a Paraiyar woman can easily free herself from the bonds of marriage and return to live at her parents'; she is perfectly able to be economically self-sufficient. Neither do men constitute an organized group whose aim is to get as much as possible out of women. They themselves work hard and, when their profession allows it, their wives stop working. We shall see in the following chapters that, in general, women enjoy a certain freedom. It is often they who manage the budget, do the shopping and sometimes even run the family. In some cases, it is the woman who pulls the strings in the household. In brief, it is misleading to speak of 'exploitation' in the case of family relationships such as these. Men's work is far from negligible even if, and the fact should be underlined, it is sometimes less important than that of women.

Before concluding, we shall say something about the tasks reserved to each of the sexes. In the brickyards, men and women make the bricks. However, it is men who cut the wood for fuel and arrange the kilns in pyramids, this being a rather specialized task. The making of bricks is generally done by couples and most often it is the women who make the bricks themselves, because of the question of greater speed owing to better physical adjustment. Men prepare the clay and help their wives. They can also act as coolies, like the women, but women find work more easily because of the great difference in wages. Women also have an important place in agriculture: it is they who do the weeding and planting and also the harvesting. Men, on the other hand, prepare the ground, plough, sow (two operations which are quite light), make sheaves with seedlings and, during harvesting, carry sheaves and do the threshing. These tasks are clearly differentiated: a woman will never be seen ploughing a field, nor will a man be seen weeding (unless it is on his own plot of land). Men work little in the household, apart from tasks linked to the building or upkeep of the house. They also often do their own washing and sometimes cut wood. They do not disdain looking after small children to whom they show a great deal of affection. In some cases, it is men who do the shopping. On the other hand, they very seldom cook and never go to fetch water, which is a typically female activity. Children, especially girls, can help a lot in the household.

It is therefore right to underline the important place held by women in the village's economy. Although it is difficult to calculate, there is little doubt that they are responsible for a good proportion of the monetary income of the village, since they constitute 47 per cent of the active population and, in addition, they are the only ones to accomplish certain fundamental tasks. However, it would be wrong to conclude that men have total domination over women.

D) Income and Spending: A Budget out of Balance

1) Subsistence and Poverty

In this section, our aim will be to see what the principal types of monetary income among the inhabitants of Valghira Manickam are and how they spend the money they earn. From what we said at the beginning of this chapter, it will be understood that our goal is to bring out the essential characteristics of this budget rather than obtaining absolute statistical precision. As we have already said, the latter is impossible. The difficulties in calculating the income of day-labourers have already been made known, but the same difficulties persist even with salaried workers, all of whose wages are subject to deductions in advance so that their wages also vary, and it is difficult to consider that this sum is devoted each month to household spending. As far as savings and debts are concerned, the difficulty is even greater since no one keeps accounts and there is no way of obtaining definitive data on this subject. Hence it is a general idea of cash flow in the village which we shall hope to obtain. In fact, it is quite remarkable to note that money circulates little *within* the village *itself*. There are few economic transactions inside the village: work is generally found outside the village and spending is also effectuated beyond the boundaries of the locality. A second essential characteristic of this economy is the almost complete absence of accumulation of economic surplus. The Paraiyars' economy is basically one of subsistence, 'from hand to mouth', as the saying goes. As the villagers underline, money burns a hole in their pockets and the smallest banknote is immediately spent. If one were able to produce a general balance sheet of the village economy, one would doubtless become aware that the budget shows a constant deficit, that is to say that spending is much higher than monetary income. Most people do not manage to satisfy their basic needs. Obviously the notion of need

is ambiguous. It is however clear that the normal reproduction of human life is not guaranteed at Valghira Manickam. The very high infant mortality rate, the high occurrence of illnesses like leprosy, the clear deficiency in diet which can be observed every day, and the various other symptoms of poverty like, for example, the deplorable level of hygiene, all bear witness to the fact that basic needs are not satisfied. Money only circulates in small sums in the village. Most often, the villagers only deal with amounts smaller than ten rupees.

The material want of the Paraiyars should in no way be confused with a mental or moral state. What I mean to say is that the villagers, although thin and frail, lead a quiet life and do not carry on their faces the marks of the centuries of oppression which they have had to endure. The Paraiyars are first and foremost workers who have little time to be sorry for their own wretchedness. This does not mean however that life in the village is easy. While people do not die of hunger, they do die of malnutrition. We have already underlined the dietary deficiencies from which the villagers suffer.

Life in the village appears, when seen from the outside, as rather relaxed. This does not mean of course that the Paraiyars are happy with their lot, or even that they are unconscious of their material poverty. Their life is indeed a daily struggle to 'earn one's rice' and the irregular nature of day-labour makes this struggle even harsher. All complain about the difficulties they encounter in order to improve their standard of living. Most of the time however, people eat, talk and laugh at Valghira Manickam like everywhere else.

Before going on to the next paragraph, it is necessary to come back to some general considerations and note that almost all the transactions in the village have become monetary. The traditional system of services being rendered in return for other services has almost completely disappeared. Even close relatives have to be remunerated if someone employs them as a coolie. At harvesting, agricultural labourers are still sometimes paid in measures of grain, but the quantities are so small that they have little weight in the village's economy. The Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam no longer have to provide the traditional and ritual tasks of their caste. This monetary economy does not, of course, mean that no non-economic considerations enter into the fixing of wages. Nothing has a fixed price in India and wages can vary even with the relationship between the

employer and the employee. We shall have the opportunity to discuss this in the following paragraphs.

2) Income

2.1) The traditional sector: In this sector it is the hardest to evaluate income since we are dealing with the work of day-labourers which, at the same time, is seasonal. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the different periods of the year. The brick-making season lasts from January to August. During this period, there is no lack of work; incomes, without being high, are at least regular. In September, the agricultural season begins. Work becomes scarcer since there are not many large farms which can employ a high number of labourers. Women find work more easily than men, and the situation does not improve much during the two following months during which the Paraiyars 'go hungry', as they say themselves. In December, it is the end of the rainy season and some already begin brick-making again, despite the fact that the monsoon takes place at the beginning of January.

Brick-making is characterized by its being paid as piece-work. Income thus depends on the number of bricks which a couple is able to produce in a day. Wages vary, according to the brickyard, from fourteen to sixteen rupees for a thousand bricks. A couple is able to produce two thousand bricks per working day, but this is a maximum amount and such a production induces so much fatigue that they are unable to work the next day. It is therefore difficult to estimate the average number of bricks that a couple is able to attain. However, I was lucky enough to be able to use the account book of one brickyard and so could calculate the amount of wages paid to each couple. In this calculation a number of difficulties appeared: one, for example, was the fact that it was sometimes the husband and sometimes the wife who was registered in the account book. Happily enough, I personally knew the workers concerned and I was able to rectify the difficulty. This was at the O.T.W. brickyard, which had a certain number of functional problems when it started, so that workers often changed and it was difficult to select subjects who had worked for sufficiently long periods. I have tried to calculate the monthly average just for a few workers, since these were the only subjects who had worked long enough. In 1981, a fixed team of six couples was hired

Table 6: Average wages of a sample of brick-making teams in Valghira Manickam (O.T.W. brickyard) 1979–81 (in rupees)

Season	Team	Average monthly wage	Average daily wage
1979	1	314.4	15.7
	2	240.4	12.0
	3	219.6	10.9
	4	162.6	8.3
1980	1	305.2	15.2
	5	208.9	10.4
1981	1	240.9	12.0
	5	196.6	9.8
	6	196.7	9.8
	7	189.4	9.4
	8	189.2	9.4
	9	185.2	9.2
General average		220.25	11.0

and I was then able to calculate a more reliable average for the whole season.

The average daily wage is very approximate since I arbitrarily divided the average monthly wage by 20, which corresponds to five working days per week. This is probably not far from reality, but the method is so uncertain that I give the figures purely as an indication. On the other hand, what is certain is that the workers have indeed earned the average monthly amount given by the table although, of course, it is an average figure. In this respect, Table 6 requires a number of remarks. Firstly, while the general average is 220 rupees, it should be noted that the figure was much higher in 1979 (223 rupees), compared with 1981 (199 rupees). The only couple who worked for the three years at O.T.W. confirm this tendency since they went from 314 rupees to 240 rupees as a monthly average. It is possible to think that the 1981 season was not as good as the 1979 season. In 1981, the workers were handicapped by the lack of water in the wells and they were often reduced to inactivity. It is therefore possible to suppose that this constitutes a plausible explanation.

However, since we are dealing with averages here, the extreme values have to be taken into consideration. In this respect, it will also be noticed that the quality of the workers also comes into play, since Team 1 produced a much greater quantity than the other teams each time. Cinappan enjoys an excellent reputation as a worker. The 1981 season shows very homogeneous results, with the exception of Team 1. It is interesting to note that Team 7 was made up of two women, while the other teams were made up of man and wife. This particular case may perhaps lead us to be more precise in our conclusions concerning women's work: two women work neither better nor worse than a married couple. This conclusion is evidently a little hasty since it is founded on one particular case.

Other conclusions can however be drawn from the table. First of all, brick-making does not appear to be very lucrative (I myself was surprised by the figures which the table shows) as the average of 222 rupees per month is very low if one takes into account the fact that this is a *double* wage. This corresponds to an average of 5.5 rupees per person per day. Brick-making thus appears as being not much more lucrative than coolie work; it is however more regular. In addition, it should be noted that the O.T.W. brickyard offered other advantages since the bricks were counted directly, so that there was no risk of bricks being lost as far as the workers were concerned if it rained, as is the case elsewhere. It is therefore possible to expect slightly lower wages in other brickyards. A wage of 220 rupees per month is very little. Taking into account the fact that the price of rice was more than three rupees in 1981, the greater part of such a wage was spent on rice, since a family of four people needs at least 1.5 kg of rice per day: so that in a month, a family has to spend $1.5 \times 3 \times 30 = 135$ rupees on rice at a minimum. Note however that this is a fixed spending which has to be made each month, whereas incomes are not regular and can even fall rather low during certain months. We shall come back to spending in the following paragraphs, but it must of course be noted that, in many cases, the wage mentioned in Table 6 is not the only income of the family. There is often another member of the family who works. Also, workers do not only make bricks, but are also employed as coolies by the brickyard each time that a kiln has to be built. They then have an additional income a few days per month. It is therefore necessary to add some tens of rupees to the monthly average in order to obtain a reliable figure.

Finally, it happens that a worker will absent himself for a few days from the brickyard if he finds more profitable work. It thus appears that there are other possible sources of income. If one adds 50 rupees to the 220 rupees of the table, one obtains a figure which, to my way of thinking, is reasonably close to reality, but evidently I would not claim it to be scientifically accurate. It is a rough approximation and nothing else.

As I well know a few of the work teams which appear in Table 6, I can give a brief description of them in order to see the make-up of the families and their other monetary incomes:

Team 1: Cinnapan and his wife are the only members of the family who work. They are young and have three boys. The eldest, who is eleven years old (more or less), has begun working however, but earns almost no money.

Team 5: Arockyam and his wife are in the same situation, but none of their three children work. Arockyam's mother-in-law often lives in their home. They have no other source of income.

Team 6: S. Sebastian and his wife also have three small children. The couple are again the sole source of income for the family and they also have a dependent mother-in-law during part of the year.

Team 7: The team of women is made up of Antonyamman and her niece Gnaaman. Antonyamman is married with three daughters, one of whom is married outside the village. The other two are aged between sixteen and eighteen. One of them works as a coolie, the other is the only girl from the village, in this context, who goes to school. The husband works as caretaker of St Mary's School and earns 90 rupees per month. Gnaaman is also married. Her husband works at the municipality and earns 300 rupees per month. She has three children, of whom the eldest is about ten years old. The husband's wage makes this household a somewhat better-off family.

Team 8: Cinniah is the head of one of the few extended families in the village. All the children are of working age. The eleven of them live in their little hut, including Cinniah's three grandchildren. There are therefore eight adults who work: the wife runs one of those little shops which bring in almost nothing. The others work as coolies or brick-makers. Two married sons live in this household. Incomes are thus greater, but so is spending since the household comprises no less than eight adults.

Team 9: A. Sebastian and his wife live alone with their one-year-old baby. They have no other source of income.

Teams 2,3,4: These come from Sebastianpatnam and are unknown to me.

It thus becomes apparent that there are important differences between the various families, simply from the point of view of make-up and monetary income. In general, one can say that the months during which they earn more than 250 rupees are relatively comfortable, while the months where they earn less than 200 rupees are particularly difficult. However, income is so low that it is impossible to save and redistribute this income in a better fashion.

But, as we have said, brick-making is seasonal and only takes place, more or less, from February to August, with January and September as turning-points. For the rest of the year, the brick-makers are therefore agricultural workers or coolies. It should be noted that there are a certain number of people who are coolies all the year round. For these people, work is also different from one season to another. During the brick-making season, there are numerous possibilities of employment in building work or even in the brickyards. Monetary income then becomes more regular. In the big brickyards, there are even men who are hired as coolies for eight rupees a day, which places them above the workers since the latter hardly earn more per team (see Table 4). But such cases are relatively rare. Usually, coolie work is more irregular.

We have said and restated how difficult it is to estimate a coolie's income. Given this fact, I undertook an interesting experiment in the village. I observed that the coolies had no idea of the number of days they worked per week. I therefore decided to count them myself. I selected four coolie couples (men and women) and I noted every day for a month the days on which they worked. Evidently I did not inform the couples of the experiment, the sense of which they would not have understood. The four couples were made up of married people, still young and active, who were all brick-makers during the season. They all had small children and corresponded pretty well to the average Valghira Manickam family.

The experiment proved more irksome than one might have thought. In the first place, we did not meet the individuals concerned each day and we therefore had to discreetly and slyly question a child or a neighbour. This was always done in an informal fashion with questions like, 'Hello Arockyam! Are you working with Sebastian today like yesterday?' We asked these questions as though they were simply polite conversation and no one ever realized anything. Even so, we sometimes obtained erroneous information which we

were luckily enough able to correct the next day, or later on, since we always tried to confirm our data. Table 7 gives the results obtained.

The number of days worked per month thus varies from four to twenty-three. Here also, certain remarks must be made and it is perhaps useful to describe the personalities and the particularities of the individuals, in order to understand the data better.

Couple 1: This couple is among the poorest in the village. Both of them have been seriously ill. It is quite possible that the husband has caught leprosy and his wife was miraculously cured from tuberculosis. They have three children the eldest of whom is seven years old.

Couple 2: They are neighbours of Couple 1 and have three small children. Vedamuttu's mother lives with them and does not work. He is considered to be a good worker. He has worked principally in road-making while she has worked in the fields, but not a great deal, perhaps because of a breast-fed infant, about a month old.

Couple 3: This couple have serious material difficulties. They have five children, the eldest not yet eight. The last two, girl twins, are in a pitiful state. The mother has difficulties in working since she has to look after the family. She herself is very frail. During week one, Sowrymuttu, the father, worked little since he caught a chill. He has done the same road-making work as Vedamuttu (Couple 2).

Couple 4: Taînis and his wife work a lot. They have four children, the eldest seven or eight years old and the youngest two or three months old. Taînis has found regular work on a farm as an agricultural labourer. His wage is none the less below average since he is paid between five and seven rupees per day.

On the basis of Table 7, it is possible to estimate the income of each couple, but the hazardous nature of these estimations must be emphasized since they are also based on averages. Table 8 therefore gives an idea of what coolies can earn and not scientifically accurate figures, even if we can be sure that the reality is close to the data given.

To obtain these results, I took into consideration the wages I knew. I have rounded off the figures to the next highest integer: for example, I have taken as the average wage for women the amount of 5 rupees per day which is much higher than the real situation, since they sometimes earn only 3.50 rupees, and never more than 5 rupees. This gives an average of 210 rupees per couple. In this sample, there is no other monetary income for the couple and so this amount

Table 7: Number of days worked by a sample of coolie workers from Valghira Manickam during September 1981

Team		Week					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Couple 1	M	4	5	1	4	3	17
	F	1	1	7	5	3	17
	Total	5	6	8	9	6	34
Couple 2	M	3	5	4	5	3	20
	F	2	1	3	2	2	10
	Total	5	6	7	7	5	30
Couple 3	M	1	4	6	5	3	19
	F	1	0	1	0	2	4
	Total	2	4	7	5	5	23
Couple 4	M	5	6	6	5	1	23
	F	4	1	5	2	3	15
	Total	9	7	11	7	4	38

represents the sole source of income. In addition, it should be noted that September is a favourable month compared with the three months which follow where work is much more irregular, especially for men who then remain inactive for many weeks. The amount of 210 rupees is therefore a maximum figure. This result does indeed confirm that brick-making is more 'lucrative', so to speak, than coolie work, since to the sum of 220 rupees in Table 6 have to be added a supplementary few tens of rupees. Another remark is necessary as far as the men's work is concerned: it is much higher than that of women in our sample, since they worked 79 days against only 46 worked by women. They brought in almost three times the money as the women, that is to say 667 rupees against only 230 rupees. This major divergence is explained by the difference in wages, but also by the fact that men still find work easily in September. During October and December, their spouses will again have the upper hand. In addition, the low figures for women are explained by the fact that three of them were breast-feeding at the time of the enquiry.

In brief, it is important to notice that the income of workers in the traditional sector is characterized above all by its irregularity. It

Table 8: Estimation of the income of a sample of coolie couples during September 1981

Team		Amount (Rs)
Couple 1	M	136
	F	85
	Total	221
Couple 2	M	160
	F	50
	Total	210
Couple 3	M	152
	F	20
	Total	172
Couple 4	M	161
	F	75
	Total	236
Grand total		839
Average		209.70

is possible to estimate that it oscillates, throughout the year, between 200 and 250 rupees. We shall have the opportunity to see what such an amount represents in a family budget. It is however necessary to repeat that these figures are at the same time averages and estimations. In addition, they do not cover the whole population of the village, but only a sample. It is true that we have good reasons to believe they are not too far from reality. They show clearly that there are important individual differences between the workers: some are more 'expert' than others, more resolute, or in better health. Important divergences can appear between the different individuals, but it is the average figures which allow us to obtain a general idea. It would doubtless have been interesting to redo the same enquiry in October and November, since this would have allowed us to get close to a minimum amount. Failing this, we must content ourselves with underlining the nature of income in the traditional sector. Day-labourers are strongly affected by exterior conditions, in particular bad weather. In this, the traditional sector is also different from the modern sector, which we shall now examine.

As in traditional economic studies, we have put forward a certain number of estimations. It should however be noted that, unlike such studies, our results are not based on a vague estimation given by the workers themselves, but on more painstaking observations.

2.2) The modern sector: The traditional sector employs the majority of the village's population. A notable feature is its relative homogeneity as far as wages are concerned, since all the workers suffer the same lot. This is not the case in the modern sector where numerous types of workers are to be found. These types can be divided into two main categories: on the one hand, a category where the workers' wages are higher than in the traditional sector (columns 3 to 8 of Table 4) and, on the other hand, a category where they earn less (columns 9 to 12 of the same table).

Let us begin with the second category, where a question is immediately raised: how is it that certain people accept work where they earn less than what they could earn in the traditional sector? First of all, it should be noted that only a minority work in this category, that is to say 26 people out of 261, the active population. A closer look shows that this minority is none the less significant, in particular, as far as column 9 is concerned: the 14 workers in factories and workshops are all young and unmarried. The wages they earn are distinctly lower than those of brick-makers: they are often no higher than 100 rupees per month. The same is true of the two men in column 4, who are educated young people, obliged to work as servants for slightly higher amounts (eight rupees per day). These young men have not yet had to assume their economic responsibilities. They are not married and some of them do not even take their earnings home. It is a godsend for them to be able to try their luck in an industrial sector which is both modern and promising. Work is much less arduous than in the traditional sector and the prestige is higher. People become 'clean workers' who use machines, unlike the coolies who are always dirty. The way these young people dress, always impeccably with smart haircuts, bears witness to their pretension as far as status is concerned. It is possible that once they get married, they will have to force themselves to go back to brick-making. This is not always the case however, since the four Hindus in column 11 work in restaurants in Madras and Bangalore for ridiculously low sums (75 to 100 rupees), while their wives work in the village in the traditional sector. As for column 10, it is not very significant since

it is made up of two old women who sell almost nothing, while only the third woman seems to make a living from her shop. In brief, this category is characterized above all by a strong attraction, among young people, towards modern and prestigious work. There can be no doubt that employers take advantage of this attraction and propose derisory wages which do not allow a household to live. Such work can be a stepping-stone for better situations, or it can simply be the waiting-room leading to the traditional sector for young people who, having grown up too soon, do not directly wish to assume their economic responsibilities. It is striking to note that many of these young people do not take their earnings home but spend them on themselves, which is not the case of young people who work in the traditional sector. The latter are already completely part of the world of those who really work and sometimes support the family, as is the case of Jesuraj whose father abandoned him along with his mother and sister. Young workers in the modern sector are often people from better-off families who deem that they do not need an additional wage. This explanation doubtless answers our initial question.

The second category covers columns 3 to 8 and is very different. This is the true 'economic aristocracy' of the village, although the expression is out of place, and too much importance should not be attached to it. This category concerns workers with higher wages and their jobs are keenly sought after. All these workers earn wages of more than 300 rupees, apart from the masons and cart-drivers who perhaps earn a little less. The municipal scavengers are the most numerous in this category. The Paraiyars have found in this employment a modern continuation of their ritual tasks. The wages are attractive—as high as 350 rupees and above. The wages in column 4 are even more attractive since it covers specialized work at the Electricity Board or at the Water Department. Wages vary between 400 and 600 rupees. The earnings in column 5 are more difficult to calculate, since they comprise a fixed wage and bonuses for the bus drivers and conductors, whereas the two taximen only get percentages and no fixed wage. It is in this category that the highest wage in the village is to be found: 900 rupees for a railway employee. I have also included the two Hindus who work at Dubai for even higher wages. The 'white-collar' workers are, in fact, two in number since the two women who have been included in this column are the teachers at the balwadi school who earn little. The two men, who

are respectively an employee and a teacher in a school, earn 425 and 440 rupees. It should be noted that most people in this category do not receive their complete wage since they have advance deductions on their earnings, having borrowed money from their employers. A number of them thus see their earnings reduced by more than 100 rupees per month. None the less, it is interesting to note that almost none of the spouses of the people in this category, including masons and cart-drivers, work. This clearly confirms the fact that the income of these families is superior to that of workers in the traditional sector. Once again, the Paraiyars need little to live on and, once this bare minimum is obtained, nothing really urges them to work more.

Masons and cart-drivers are self-employed. They therefore earn money according to the contracts they manage to get. As a general rule, these two professions, which are quite well represented in the village, have little difficulty in finding work, except during October and November, when they are sometimes reduced to working as coolies, given the slow-down of activity in building work. A mason earns between 13 and 15 rupees per working day and, if he is well organized, he can work more regularly than a coolie; this can allow him to earn more than 300 rupees. For a cart-driver, the investments are higher since he needs a cart (Rs 1500) and a pair of good oxen (Rs 1500). Fodder costs almost 10 rupees a day. Despite this, a cart-driver can gross more than 25 rupees per day, which puts him in a position similar to that of a mason. The relatively favourable condition of masons and cart-drivers is apparent in the fact that their wives do not work.

The reasonably high wages in the modern sector confirm that it is a falsely enticing sector. Some modern professions with a rather low wage constitute a bridge between the two sectors. A certain number of young people who gamble on getting better jobs are found in this category. Such employment is generally temporary unlike that of their elders who enjoy an economically enviable situation. The difference between this sector and the traditional sector is however not radical, apart from the case of a few people like the railway employee or the Persian Gulf workers. But work in this sector is less arduous, more enriching and more prestigious, and this contributes to its attractiveness.

2.3) Are there social classes?: It is possible to ask oneself if the difference between the two sectors has repercussions on the formation

of distinct social classes. It is certain that the modern epoch has transformed the economic life of Indians, and that the fact of belonging to certain groups transcends caste divisions: the Electricity Board workers, for example, belong to unions independent of their caste and this is the case with other workers as well. In addition, there are quite clear differences in wages inside the village since some privileged people earn more than 600 rupees per month, while the majority have to make do with less than 200 rupees. This differentiation probably did not exist a century ago, when everyone lived under the same conditions.

However, it is not possible to speak of true social classes or even of the formation of classes. First of all, the differences in wages are not sufficient for constituting castes and these differences are not always as great as one might think. For example, scavengers often have large deductions in advance on their wages and their wives do not work, so that they are not in a privileged position, compared with workers in the traditional sector. They can simply buy tiles for their roof, a nylon sari for their wives and perhaps a little more vegetables, but the difference does not go much further. A worker in the traditional sector who is assiduous, thrifty and resolute can equally hope for as much. Secondly, from a cultural point of view, there is no manifest difference between a scavenger and a brick-maker either. Among the latter, we can find workers who have more than average education. Socially speaking, the difference is not clear-cut: the son of a mason and his brother can work as brick-makers, so that there is no family monopoly over professions. Friendships are formed independently of economic positions. There are indeed a few families which stand out, but they do not associate together in order to form homogeneous groups. There is no organic relationship between the two sectors, which are not even clearly defined since it is possible to cross over from one to the other. There is also another aspect: a man like Ramanathan, a worker from Dubai who earns more than 2,000 rupees a month, is very involved in village affairs when he comes back. It is evident that his family lives better than a coolie's family, with greater comfort and better nutrition, but this does not imply that their lives are completely different: Ramanathan's wife lives in the village with women coolies and his family is essentially made up of people from the same milieu. The great majority of the villagers are workers, in point of fact. Among them are to be found

a few better-off families, and some stand out to a certain degree like, for example, those who own a little land; but this is not sufficient to create distinct groups. It is we who have brought out the distinction between the modern and traditional sectors, and this distinction does not correspond to a real cleavage in Paraiyar society at Valghira Manickam. Is this something which might take place one day? It is possible, but here we are leaving the domain of social anthropology for the more hazardous one of futurology. In the meantime, there can be no doubt that the better-off families try to make prestigious marriages with people of the same economic level, but this is not yet a well-defined tradition. Dowries are not yet required unlike in the higher castes. No sub-caste is currently being formed on the basis of economic differentiation, and it is not possible to speak of true social classes in the Paraiyar community of Valghira Manickam.

3) Landowning and Other Income

Till now, we have basically given attention to the Paraiyars' wages. Do they not have any other income? In rural areas land is an important source of income. In the village, however, few own land. It is always difficult to obtain data concerning landowning. I had to correct my initial statements a number of times, and I am sure that the figures given here are not totally satisfying. But one thing is sure: few people own land and landed property is somewhat restricted. Nobody owns irrigated land or more than five acres.

Only 17 families out of 114 own land, against 97 who do not. Taken as an average, 22 families rent a little land from a Kallar, and this represents income in grain. Among those who rent land, there are some who already own land, so that, altogether, a good thirty families can count on agricultural income, that is to say, a little more than a quarter of the village population. It would however be a mistake to imagine that such income is considerable. Only those who own between two and five acres (i.e. six families) obtain more than negligible income. The others often experience failure. Their land is, in any case, very restricted and of bad quality. The same is true of the land rented from the Kallars. In most cases land is no larger than an acre. Obviously, it is the worst land which the Kallars rent to the Harijans. The villagers call the system of tenure *kuttakai*, but to my way of thinking, this is a mistake since, traditionally speaking, this term covers a kind of rental where the quantity of grain which has to be paid to the owner is fixed (see Reiniche 1978: 157 or Béteille

Table 9: Number of landowning families by community in Valghira Manickam

Community	Land owned			
	More than 2 acres	Less than 2 acres	No land	Tenure
Christians	3	5	69	15
Hindus	3	6	28	7
Total	6	11	97	22

1966: 120). Here we are dealing rather with a *vâram* system of tenure since the tenant has to give a third of the harvest to the owner. In fact, the harvests are so scanty here that there is no rigorous control over them. If the harvest is average, the peasant will give a sack of rice to the Kallar, but some people claimed that they gave nothing at all if the harvest was a really bad one. Commercial crops are not grown, only rice or millet for home consumption. Those who have more than two acres grow enough to be able to live off their crops for a good part of the year, at least when the harvest is a good one. But it must be borne in mind that two-thirds of the village households do not grow anything at all. Land is an excellent complement to work, since it yields supplementary cereals. Unfortunately, the quality of the ground is so poor, the climatic conditions are so unsure, and the agricultural methods so rudimentary, that production is largely insufficient.

The enterprising spirit of some Paraiyars can furnish them with important sources of income. They are not professionals, but simply masons, coolies or brick-makers ready to seize a good opportunity. For example, Vedamattu, a coolie, accepts contracts for spreading out earth along a road. He undertakes the job for a few hundred rupees, and hires help whom he pays daily. Should the work be finished in good time, he makes a good profit. Selvaraj accepted a similar contract for making sheaves with rice seedlings for 250 rupees. There were four people among whom the sum had to be divided, and the job only lasted four days, so that each of them got more than 60 rupees, a quite important sum. Among the masons, this procedure is even more frequent. Sebastian, for example, took on a contract for building small houses at 800 rupees per house. It takes seven days

to finish a house but, in this case, manpower cost him more than 100 rupees per day, or at least this is what he stated. He therefore claimed that he was going to lose money in the venture. Such contracts thus carry a certain risk and the losses can balance out the profits. None the less, the villagers undertake this kind of initiative, since it is a unique opportunity to earn small sums of money. Another example is that of Arockyam, who agreed to fence in a field for 250 rupees; five men (including himself) worked for three days on this job; this implied 150 rupees in expenditure on wages and a net profit of 100 rupees.

With a little capital, some workers can start their own brickyard. With a few hundred rupees, they can hope to build a kiln of 25,000 bricks which can bring in a net profit of 500 to 1,000 rupees. Such cases are rare, but there are at least two workers in the village who are on the point of becoming real entrepreneurs. One of them, Arulraj, practically no longer makes the bricks himself but essentially deals with the sale of bricks and organizing the work. The other, Rajiv, still works in his brickyard, but manages to start a new brickyard each year. There is a third family, quite well-off, which owns a brick-yard which employs only two workers. To these cases should be added that of one or another worker who, from time to time, manages to get together a small sum to start up a brickyard; after baking in the kiln is finished, they become simple workers again, not without having made a small profit which can be used for building a house, or some other important purchase. Rajiv's case is worth describing because of his tenacity:

> Rajiv and his wife Arockyaimary suffered a lot. In order to start their first brickyard, they pawned her jewellery. Having thus at their disposal a small amount of capital, they managed to make 50,000 bricks, but the kiln was badly made and they were only able to bake 30,000 bricks. Hence they made almost no profit. Rajiv's father-in-law spent the money and they had nothing left. However, they had another piece of jewellery which they pawned and they started the venture again. This time, it was a success and they have since continued.

Rajiv is known as a good entrepreneur, but his wife is just as able in this domain. She also has extraordinary will power and one cannot help admiring such a couple.

Shops in the village often work on the same principle: someone buys 100 rupees worth of various articles and sells them for a total

of more or less 150 rupees; that is to say, a small profit is realized. Some specialize in building roofs or digging wells, hoping to obtain one or other profitable contract. The villagers, especially the younger ones, like to talk about the possibilities of making money, but only a minority manage to obtain results.

A man like Arulraj, mentioned above, is certainly becoming more important, economically speaking, in the village. He employs six or seven couples in his brickyard and seems to be a real businessman. He still lives in the village. He has built a house for himself with solid building material. His lifestyle is not very different from that of the other inhabitants. His two children are well looked after, and he was able to pay for an operation for his little daughter who had a heart ailment. His son goes to the De Britto school and, of course, his wife does not work. A family like this thus continues to live among the other Paraiyars, despite being a privileged one. It constitutes perhaps the embryo of a privileged class which may, one day, be born among the Paraiyars. Today, such cases are too isolated for them to be separated from the rest of the community. The few landowning Paraiyars, those who earn a large wage, and the entrepreneurs might one day refuse to join the others, and thus form a sub-caste. This is the case in the region, where some well-off Pallars have formed the *Karumaravar,* or black Maravar, sub-caste. They have no truck with the other Pallars. Among the Paraiyars, the cases are much too isolated to be able to produce such extremes.

Finally, there is another category who earn a little more than the others. They are the agents of the Madras brickyards. A large number of Paraiyars are hired every year at Madras, in order to make bricks during the whole dry season. The big brickyards of Madras have agents who undertake to recruit manpower. They are paid a reasonably large commission on the number of bricks made by their recruits. There are several such agents in the village. One of them makes his living sufficiently well for him not to have to work any longer. This man, Ignatius, hires 80 couples and gets 50 rupees commission for each hundred thousand bricks made. Each couple makes at least 100,000 bricks which therefore means that, by the end of the season, Ignatius obtains a minimum of 4,000 rupees. Such a sum is enough to cover the needs of his family. There are two or three other agents in the village, employing fewer people. Only Suvakin. a young married man, makes a good profit. He makes bricks himself in Madras

from January to July, but the rest of the year he lives off his commissions and hardly works. The third case is even less profitable and makes little money from the venture.

In brief, it may be seen that, from time to time, it is possible to earn small sums of money which are greater than what is otherwise earned. Some manage their living out of this, but this is rare. In some cases, these secondary occupations mean worthwhile incomes. But the great majority of the population is not affected by these advantages and survive on their wages.

4) Spending

Wages are meaningful only in relation to price levels. In other words, the question must be asked: what goods can a Paraiyar buy with his wages? Economic studies often suppose that the populations studied are rational and pragmatic; it will be claimed that a wage of 300 rupees allows one to buy 100 kilograms of rice at three rupees a kilogram, which represents so many calories. The reality is different since, even in dire poverty, wages are not completely spent on indispensable articles. It is true that the poorest will devote a high percentage of their wages on such articles, but even among the least privileged, money is spent on alcohol, at cards, on tea, on toys for the children, on cigarettes or even on going to see a film. We shall have the opportunity to see this in the present section. Secondly, families do not keep 'rational' accounts either. If, for an economist, a coolie earns, let us say, 250 rupees per month on average, for the coolie the same is not the case: if he earns 280 rupees one month, he will not save 30 rupees for the month when he will earn only 200 rupees. Saving is not one of the great qualities of the poor; they hardly have the opportunity.

Food constitutes the essential expenditure of the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam. We have seen what a Paraiyar meal is made up of: rice or rice water, accompanied by some vegetables. Our calculations concerning their income equally took into account the frugality of their food. During certain months, the coolies hardly have money to buy rice with and little else besides. In October-November, incomes are so low that some have to make do with cheaper cereals. The villagers have the right to a ration card, which entitles them to buy subsidized rice at the ration shop at Kanda Devi. The card entitles a person to 4 kilograms of rice per month and the rest has to be bought,

often on credit, at a supply shop at Devakottai. Buying on credit is disadvantageous since the tradesman takes an additional percentage. Rice constitutes, in any case, one of the essential expenditures of the household since, as we have seen, it can represent half of the total spending. The importance of rice is reflected in conversation: people talk about the price of rice and shake their heads, qualities are compared and it is usual to show a visitor the rice that has just been bought. Before buying rice, Tamils taste it raw to judge its quality. People complain about the perpetually rising price of rice, and the poor quality of rationed rice which is not always available.

It is also possible to buy other essential commodities at the ration shop like, for example, paraffin for the lamps or oil which Indians use a great deal both for cooking and for body care. Lentils, flour, cereals, etc. can also be bought there. Vegetables are usually bought at the market in Devakottai or at the Sunday market. The price of vegetables is quite high. Aubergines, for example, cost about one rupee per kilogram and ladyfingers two rupees. For this reason the Paraiyars hardly eat vegetables apart from chillis or red peppers. The favourite vegetable is the aubergine. The Paraiyars do not often buy clothes and each item is worn almost threadbare, so that textiles do not constitute an important item of expenditure.

Part of the budget is devoted to pastimes. The cinema costs less than two rupees per person and the whole family sees a film, if there is enough money. In addition, men go regularly (some go every day) to Devakottai to drink tea, and some wives complain that their husbands eat from time to time in a tea shop. A perfect illustration of the caution given above about the non-rational nature of certain items of expenditure is money spent on card playing. Men do not play regularly at cards, but only during the rainy months when they have little work. They then play the whole day and even at night. At this time of the year, families have little income at their disposal and when a man loses a few rupees at cards, he often has no money left in the evening for buying rice. Alcohol is another problem. The Paraiyars drink regularly. It is impossible to say how much they spend on drink; no one likes to admit to drinking a lot. Certain people are known to drink regularly, and a mason's wife told me that her husband used to drink half his wages every day. Seeing the state in which this man was every day, I tend to believe her, but this is an extreme case. Many indeed drink regularly (every day?), but not as much. Some

men completely abstain from alcohol, but I do not think this is the rule. Even if alcoholism is not really widespread, it is nevertheless a serious problem, given the level of income.

Apart from regular expenditure, there are occasional items of expenditure which are more costly. For example, in the case of illness. It has been said that the Paraiyars are often ill, and medical fees are high. If a baby is ill, it is sometimes necessary to wait for the father to come home, with his wages, to be able to go to the doctor. Clothes are another expenditure which is costly, since a sari, for example, costs about 50 rupees (minimum) and a man's shirt costs about the same. If a woman stops producing milk, she has to buy powdered milk to feed her baby and this is terribly expensive. Children sometimes have to buy books for school. From time to time fodder has also to be bought for the cow. The house also regularly needs a minimum of upkeep (roof, beams, etc.). Visitors have to be fed, and festive occasions obviously cost money, even if the Paraiyars do not celebrate too ostentatiously. The ceremonies related to the first menstruation, marriages, funerals and religious festivals always imply expenditure. Not only do visitors have to be fed, but it is also necessary to buy presents. Before the annual village festival, for example, the villagers are always preoccupied by the number of visitors which their family will be receiving; people complain that they only come to eat and it is necessary to try and find the money to feed them. It is easy to understand that these special items of expenditure are a heavy burden on the budget, even if the Paraiyars did not indulge in exaggeration.

Before concluding, it is perhaps necessary to say something about the social importance of spending in the life of the village. Unlike what happens in certain high castes, where wealth manifests itself by the tendency to spend rather than to save (see, for example, Béteille 1966: 173), there is little prestige spending among the Paraiyars. Even dowry, a fundamental institution in India, is reduced here to a bare minimum and is sometimes even non-existent. There is no institution which makes lavish spending conspicuous. The reason is understandable, since the Paraiyars never have at their disposal impressive sums of money. An Indian friend told me that Harijans who obtained a loan of a thousand rupees from a cooperative society, in order to buy a cow, remained dumbfounded and immobile with this money in their hands. They could not help gazing at it, so

much did the amount impress them. However, the idea of spending is not without importance in the village. In a somewhat American fashion, a villager directly evaluates an object by the amount of money it cost him. This is the case for a cow, a house, or a second-hand bicycle. Someone with a good job will say that, today it would be necessary to spend 1,500 rupees in bribes in order to obtain such a job. Children's studies are also evaluated in terms of money. As far as illness is concerned, this tendency is even more marked. The importance of an illness is evaluated by the expenditure it has incurred. In order to prove that an illness is incurable, it is stated that tens of rupees have been spent without success.

I have abstained till now from giving figures, as far as spending is concerned, because I do not think it is possible to express them as such. Obviously it is possible to ask estimations from the villagers, but I think I have shown to what extent these estimations fill me with scepticism in general. Two main aspects of this outline of the various family expenditures should be retained: on the one hand, the Paraiyars' income only allows them to buy a minimum of goods and it is, in any case, insufficient for guaranteeing a healthy and balanced life. On the other hand, the Paraiyars' income cannot be directly expressed in terms of items for subsistence, nor converted into 'calories': a not unimportant part of their incomes is used for 'superfluous' goods and services—superfluous in the sense that they are not directly linked to the survival of the individual: cinema, alcohol and games of chance. What stands out in this picture is that the general budget of the village is in deficit. The needs of the villagers exceed their income and the search for money is constant. The obvious result is chronic debt which will be the subject of the next section.

5) Debt

If it is true that it is not easy to express a household's expenditure in figures, it is even truer to say that its debts are a matter of secrecy. Nobody likes to give the exact figure of his own debts. If someone hopes to get help, he will tend to exaggerate the amount, while if, on the contrary, he wishes to show that he is relatively well-off, he will underestimate it. In addition, many villagers are ignorant of the exact amount of their debts. That the family budget is generally in deficit is not a matter of doubt. Every family, even the poorest, is always in search of a loan. Even when the subsistence of the family

is guaranteed, there are other important expenditures, like the upkeep of the roof of the house, the purchase of a cow, etc. In brief, the lack of money explains why the Paraiyars are always trying to borrow it or are always in the process of repaying a debt. None the less, I have the impression that the Paraiyars are less in debt than the majority of Indian peasants. Debt is a scourge in rural India, but the French proverb 'you only lend money to a rich man' takes on its full meaning here. The Paraiyars are not financially 'solvent' and moneylenders do not take the risk of lending them large amounts. Hence the villagers are only in debt for relatively small sums. Generally speaking, it is not easy for the villagers to find money. The various sources of credit will be examined in the next paragraph.

It is hardly surprising to learn that internal credit in the village is extremely limited. Nobody there has the means to lend large sums of money. I only encountered one notable case: a Pallar from Pani Pulan Vayal apparently lent 1,200 rupees to a Christian. The latter rapidly repaid 900 rupees, but had great difficulty in paying the rest. Unfortunately, I have few details about this transaction, apart from the fact that the Pallar comes each day to pester the Paraiyar to get his money back. Indeed, this is one of the reasons which make me think that these internal loans are even more limited since the villagers know perfectly well that the debtor will only repay at the last possible deadline, and that, in certain cases, he will never pay it back. This is what happened between Sebastian and Sowrymuttu: the former, who worked in the brickyard of the latter, had obtained from him an advance of 200 rupees. Sowrymuttu was aware that he would never see the money again, and Sebastian avoided him as much as possible. The advantage of such loans obviously resides in the low rate of interest which is sometimes zero, in contrast to the exorbitant rates of the moneylenders. This is why the Paraiyars always try to find money within the village, even if this is not easy.

When this is impossible, it means deciding to go outside the village. It is preferable to approach an acquaintance, a relative or a friend, again because of the question of the rate of interest. I hence ask myself just how many requests for help the parish priest receives—probably quite an impressive number. A Hindu told me, in confidence, that he regularly approached the parish priest to obtain 1,000 rupees in order to build his house. I am uncertain of his chances of success, but after all, it does not cost anything to try. It is evident

that Thanappan and myself were obvious targets for this kind of request. Despite the fact that we initially made things clear on this subject, everybody tried their luck for reasons such as an operation, a brickyard, a new house, a journey, etc. For those who work at the municipality, the employer is the perfect agency to supply a little money. Thus, as I have already indicated, all of these workers have deductions in advance on their wages. As a last resort, it is possible to address oneself to a Kallar from Kanda Devi, or a Chettiar from Devakottai, but these loans are very costly.

In general, the interest rate is 10 per cent per month, i.e. 120 per cent per year. It is understandable that, under such conditions, it is very difficult for Paraiyars to borrow money. However there are certain circumstances where it becomes necessary for them to bring themselves to accept such extremities. This can be the case, for example, because of an unexpected illness. Or, for the village festival and the necessity of a hundred or so rupees in order to receive guests, which can entail getting in touch with a Chettiar. As is the case among most moneylenders in India, a Chettiar will not lend money without making his debtor ask insistently for the loan, nor without someone to act as guarantor. The Kallars of Kanda Devi are peasants and not moneylenders. However, they lend money at the same rate of interest as the moneylenders and, in addition, they demand compensation from the Paraiyars, who are required to work on their land for wages much lower than what they earn elsewhere. This system of dependence seems well established, and is to be found in other villages, between the Udayars and the Paraiyars. We shall give the details in the next chapter, but we can already note here that it is one of the ways in which the relationship between the high castes and the Harijans is perpetuated. Such loans are never much greater than 100 rupees, since the rates of interest are too high for the Paraiyars to be able to bear the cost of more.

If someone owns jewellery, this can be pawned at a moneylender's or sold. The Paraiyars so frequently fall back on this procedure that they soon have no jewellery left. I was struck, for example, by the fact that many women no longer had their *tâli*, which is the symbol of marriage. For the Tamils, it is an essential ornament, with which one normally never parts. Paraiyar women are, in fact, very embarrassed to admit that they no longer wear it, and Thanappan told me that he himself found it very awkward each time he discovered the

secret. Since the villagers own few pieces of jewellery of any value, this kind of loan is evidently limited.

In certain circumstances, it is possible to obtain attractive loans. Such is the case of the 'housing schemes' or 'cattle schemes', which are organized regularly by the authorities and which are a great success among the Paraiyars. More than 50 families have subscribed to a loan for a cow. In general, this allows them to gain a double advantage. The loan from the Milk Cooperative Society came to 2,000 rupees. The Paraiyars would then buy a cow for 1,000 rupees, give 200 rupees to the broker (including various bribes) and spend the rest on finding 'the' good cow (sic). Thus, this loan allowed the Paraiyars to enjoy themselves a little. Almost no one manages to repay these loans, and a friend stated that the government was regularly forced to cancel all such debts. The same is true of loans for building houses. During my stay, 37 families had introduced requests for loans of 5,000 rupees, but nobody obtained a loan since the funds of the project had been exhausted. The owners of cows are obliged to sell their milk to the Cooperative Society every day, and are supposed to repay their loan in this way. However they do not manage to do this and, in addition, many prefer to cheat and sell milk at a higher price to private individuals. In addition, milk production is so low (often less than a litre per day) that cattle bring in very little money. Since however it is the done thing to own a cow, many families have subscribed to a loan.

With this, we have finished describing the traditional system of obtaining credit. Apart from the official loans, it should be noted that debts are usually not very high, even if I am quite unable to quote exact figures. Many families borrow small amounts episodically which are quickly repaid to a moneylender, and as late as possible to an acquaintance, for reasons which have already been explained. However, we have yet to examine what is probably the principal form of obtaining credit in the village: the system of payment in advance used by the Madras brickyards. We shall briefly describe how it works. From mid-October onwards, major brickyards in Madras delegate agents in the area to recruit workers. Each agent hires a certain number of couples to whom he gives an advance of about 500 rupees. Sometimes, the amount is a little higher or a little lower, but the principle is the same. At the beginning of January, the worker leaves for Madras, with his family and a few belongings, and

works there until the loan is paid back, that is to say after six months, on average. In Madras, more or less five rupees per thousand bricks made are deducted from wages. It is thus necessary to make 100,000 bricks (i.e. six months' work) in order to repay a loan of 500 rupees. After which, in the rainy season, the worker goes back to the village.

This system is extremely successful among the workers. Every year, many couples go for six-month periods to Madras. Unfortunately, I did not count the exact number of families, but it is probable that between 20 and 30 families, more or less, leave each year, as was the case in 1981. The system shows itself to be very advantageous to the Paraiyars. It is, in the first place, a unique way of obtaining a considerable amount of money. It seems to me that this sum is spent on everyday life, without there being an exceptional reason for the expenditure. It must be remembered that, during these months, there is not much work and this advance is therefore providential. It allows people to lead a normal life without having to work too much. If a large expense has to be incurred, this advance is also a godsend. Working conditions in Madras reinforce this feeling. The return fare is paid by the employer, the bricks are counted as soon as they come out of the moulds, wages are paid regularly every Saturday, the workers are sure of finding work every day, living conditions, although basic, are good and, finally, water for the brick-yards is brought by pump, while in the village it has to be brought by the workers themselves. It is true that they work hard in Madras, but the system is attractive and they do not fail to respond to its call.

Why do Madras entrepreneurs call on workers from this area? In order to undertake such a system, the employers must make something out of it also. It seems that the workers of Ramnad are considered specialists in brick-making. In addition, it is possible to think that they accept work in Madras for very reasonable wages, given local habits. This is probably the explanation for this large displacement of manpower.

This study shows that the sources of credit are pretty variable and that moneylenders can make a profit from the great need for money among families whose budget constantly makes a deficit. The influence of the moneylenders is however limited, since the villagers have nothing to offer in exchange and, in consequence, they can only borrow small amounts of money. In addition, they prefer addressing themselves to other sources, and only accept the moneylenders'

conditions as a last resort. For brick-makers, there is moreover a system of obtaining credit which is much more worthwhile, even though it entails seasonal emigration to Madras.

E) Emigration

The future prospects for young people in the village are hardly bright. Those who have been educated are not much attracted by the prospect of spending their lives in the brickyards. Outside the seasonal emigration to Madras, the Christians are not very migratory. The big cities do of course attract young people, especially those who have been employed in the workshops, about whom we have already spoken. Some of them have tried their luck in the big cities, as is the case of two cousins, who work as mechanics in a Madras workshop, or that of the only person in the village with a university degree, who left and settled in Poona in the State of Maharashtra. Although young people like to say that they will soon leave, it is only a minority who really do go away. In preceding generations, it does seem that emigration took place with greater frequency: one family comes from Burma where an ancestor had emigrated, another from Sri Lanka, and a few men worked in Dindigul in their youth. However, in general, the Christians of Valghira Manickam are not great migrators.

This is not the case of their Hindu brothers, and this constitutes a striking difference between the two communities. The Pallars of Puni Pulan Vayal seem to resemble the Hindu Paraiyars in this respect. Among the latter, there is not a single family which does not have a close relative who works outside the village. Two men from the village work in Dubai, but this is also the case of several sons-in-law, brothers-in-law or other close relatives. Besides this, a third young man was ready to go to Iraq. Several Hindus take the necessary steps to go abroad, but I never met a single Christian who made any effort towards such a goal.

In addition, a large number of people are to be found among the Hindu Paraiyars who work in big cities such as Madurai, Madras or Bangalore. They are men who are still young, who have left in order to try their luck elsewhere, even if it means leaving a family behind. These men often work in restaurants where board and lodgings are provided, but where they earn derisory wages. Out of the 27 Hindu families, I counted at least 15 where a member worked outside the village. If one were to include sons-in-law, or brothers-in-law, the

list would be even longer. How can this striking difference between the two communities be explained? It seems to me that there is no easy explanation, and it would be dangerous to suggest hasty solutions. It is possible to push the question a little further, by saying that there is a real difference of tradition between the two communities: one is used to leaving, the other is not. But is this a difference which is specific to the village, or is it a more general one? I cannot answer this question and, among other things, it would still be necessary to know why this tradition of emigration came into being among the Hindus and not among the Christians. Are the Christians more attached to the village? This does not strike me as being at all evident. Do the Christians form a more homogeneous community? Our study shows that this is far from being the case.

I also observed two interesting facts among the Pallars. The first concerns young people who also leave quite easily in order to work elsewhere, at least for part of the year. For example, a group of young people often used to work as dockers at the port of Dharwar (Karnataka state). It seems that two young men went there one day and a few others followed afterwards. The second interesting point concerns children who run away from home. Among the Pallars, there were several families where the children had run away. The children, who left for several months without saying anything to anyone, were about ten years old. One of them told me that he had stolen money from his father's pocket while the latter was asleep. He then left with a friend in order to rejoin his brother who was working, again, at the port of Dharwar, a thousand kilometres away from the village. Thanappan told me that such examples of running away from home were not rare in Tamil Nadu. Children who have been punished or who are looking for adventure can often leave for a few months. They try and make a living by working here and there for relatives and for people of their caste. Some of them never return. This happened to a Hindu Paraiyar who was brought up in a 'Bangalore' family where he got married, but I have no further details concerning this example. This case was however unique among the Paraiyars and, once again, I cannot explain the reason for this difference between the two castes; it may be simply the result of chance.

To my way of thinking, there does however exist a difference between the Christian Paraiyars, on the one hand, and the Hindu Paraiyars, on the other. From an economic point of view, it is clear

that there is an essential difference between them: the Christians are above all brick-makers and define themselves as such. The Hindus are fewer in this occupation, and have an economic position which is less well-defined, so that there is a greater tendency among them to go and look for an economic situation elsewhere. The Pallars have a position which is even less well-defined. They define themselves, above all, as cart-drivers and keep this occupation so long as they have the money to keep up a pair of oxen. Almost no Pallars are employed in brick-making, and they are not keen on work in the traditional sector. This may be why they often make their wives work instead of themselves. This explanation is perhaps incomplete, but it seems to me the most reasonable, and as far as our knowledge allows us to go.

F) Description of Occupations

Before concluding, I think it will be useful to give a brief description of the principal tasks accomplished by the workers of Valghira Manickam, underlining this time the technical angle, and temporarily ignoring the financial aspects. We shall start with the traditional sector and then deal with the modern sector.

1) The Traditional Sector

In the traditional sector, it is possible to distinguish between three occupations, which do not exclude each other and which we will examine successively: brick-making, coolie work and finally, agricultural labour. These three occupations are almost complementary, since most of the workers in this sector go from one to the other according to the season and the circumstances.

1.1) Brick-making: We have already spoken at some length about this profession in the preceding pages. It will none the less be useful to provide a certain number of supplementary details concerning the nature of this profession. It has already been said that it takes place during a period of eight to nine months, that is to say throughout the dry season. The reason that brick-making stops during the rainy season is that the work is done in the open air; rain ruins the bricks and stops them from drying and this represents a great loss for the workers. During the rainy season, building work comes to an almost complete standstill, and activities which are related to it also slow

down: this is the case, of course, for masons, but also for the coolies and the cart-drivers. During the rainy season, brick-makers become coolies or agricultural labourers. Brick-making is done by teams of two, most often married couples. The brick-making season starts with a *puja* offered to the god Ganesh. The Christians also take part in this ceremony, without which, it is believed, the season will not be a good one. As already said, the worker's day starts at around 6 a.m. and continues until 2 or 3 p.m., with a break for food around 10 a.m. No special permit is required to start up a brickyard. It is simply necessary to choose an unoccupied part of the *kanmaî* and dig a well in order to have water. In principle, there is a tax to be paid, but it seems that nobody pays it.

The making of the bricks is relatively simple. The earth has to be mixed the day before: it is a mixture of the local red earth with clay, sand and water. Clay and sand have to be brought from outside by cart. The ideal proportions for the mixture are measured out in metal pans used by the coolies: three pans of red earth for one pan of sand. The mixture has to be prepared the day before; it is often the women who prepare the mixture during the afternoon, after the men have stopped working. The next morning, the bricks are transported from the well to the place where the bricks are actually made, and a little water is added again. The moulding of the bricks can then really begin.

This latter operation is done with the help of a wooden frame, which has the shape of two bricks. The frame is set on the floor and is filled up with the mixture. The worker levels it with his hands and the surplus is removed. He then removes the frame, and the two bricks are lined up on the ground. In order for the mould to be easily removed, it has to be moistened. Usually the workers print the name of the brickyard, often the owner's initials, on the bricks with a wooden stamp. The bricks are then lined up, with regular spaces between them big enough for a worker to put his feet in order to turn the bricks over. As may be seen, this work is not very specialized, but it is much more difficult than it seems: firstly, the work is done at ground level and secondly, it has to be done very quickly. The speed at which work is accomplished is impressive; many are unable to make bricks because of the difficulty of keeping up this quick rate in such precarious conditions.

The bricks then dry horizontally for a few hours. They are then placed vertically in order to dry out completely and, once they are dry, they are piled up on each other to await baking. They then have to be protected with palm leaves, since if it rains heavily, lost bricks are at the worker's expense. In Madras, on the contrary, bricks are counted in the worker's favour as soon as they are made. In Valghira Manickam, the worker counts the number of bricks he has made every day. Every Saturday, he receives an advance on his wages; the balance of the amount due is paid only after the bricks have been baked. This constitutes an important problem for the worker who does not receive his wages automatically. The baking of bricks requires technical knowledge. It is sometimes left, by contract, to an 'expert', i.e. a worker who wants to earn a little more money. Coolies are then hired to build the kiln; this is a big pyramid made up of brownish bricks. A kiln is generally made up of between 25,000 and 100,000 bricks. Building these pyramids is difficult since it means leaving openings for introducing firewood at two levels at least. Big logs, which stick out on all sides, are pushed through the kiln which is completely covered with mud. Openings are left at the base of the pyramid into which the wood, which is kindled initially, is put. The logs which stick out from the kiln allow the workers to see if the fire has taken at the different levels. Baked bricks are ready to be sold.

Baking is a difficult undertaking and, to my way of thinking, an unsatisfying one given the amount of spoilt bricks incurred. In a kiln of 25,000 bricks, sometimes only 15,000 get baked. The wind can completely spoil baking. Badly baked, broken or burnt bricks are sold at lower prices and are used for building huts. Firewood is very expensive. A kiln costs several thousand rupees in wood, not to mention the cost of manpower. A kiln of 100,000 bricks perhaps requires less wood, but the risk of spoilt baking is greater. In addition, a big kiln requires a large immobilization of capital, so that a kiln of 50,000 bricks seems to me to be a better compromise. Small-scale entrepreneurs often make do with kilns of 25,000 bricks with which they can hope to make a profit of 500 to 700 rupees.

The sale of bricks is often done through a broker, as is the case of many transactions in India. The price of bricks varies according to the season and the quality. During the rainy season, they are very costly, sometimes more than 150 rupees for 1,000 bricks, while

normally prices vary between 90 and 100 rupees. Carts come and take the bricks which have been sold to building sites.

The advantages of the Madras brickyards become more apparent after this description: wages are paid regularly and completely, bricks are counted immediately and water is brought by pump to the workers, so that they gain time and money. Living conditions are more or less the same as those in the village. The employer provides tent-shaped huts, which are small and simple, for each family who live where they work. The Paraiyars are content with these conditions which are no great change from the lack of comfort in the village.

There is no need to repeat here that brick-making is extremely hard work. Working conditions, under a glaring sun, are very harsh and the workers' merit is all the greater given that, in order to earn a minimum wage, they are obliged to work very quickly, sometimes to the detriment of quality. They are not able to work every day at this high rate, and they regularly have to take a day off to rest.

1.2) Coolie work: Any Indian is capable of carrying a sack of rice or a water-pot on his head and walk with it for long distances. The gracefulness with which they saunter along the roads in this fashion has always astonished foreigners. The Indians, on the other hand, are surprised to see us trailing heavy suitcases around with our arms—it would be so much simpler to carry them on one's head! This bodily technique, which so fascinates us, is also the profession of a large part of the Indian population, and a not unimportant proportion of the villagers. Coolies are legendary figures. They carry everything anywhere. There are no barrows in India, since anything that can be transported by a man or a woman is carried on the head, from a bunch of bananas to a board of cement, not to mention suitcases, beds, wardrobes, large stones and, of course, bricks. At Valghira Manickam there are a large number of coolies, especially women.

In addition to people who are coolies the whole year round, there are a lot of workers who work as coolies on an occasional basis, or who do so during the rainy season. Every time a kiln is built, the brick-makers become coolies for a few days. In addition, in the big brickyards, there are sometimes men who work full-time as coolies: such is the case of Marya Arockyam who earns eight rupees a day in this fashion. The majority of coolies are employed in building work. Each building site requires a certain number of coolies for bringing the bricks, unloading the carts or lorries, carrying cement,

etc. When a road is built or enlarged, it is the same coolies who do most of the work. Each and every lorry or cart is loaded and unloaded by coolies. During the rainy season, the slowing down of activity in building work drives the coolies to become agricultural labourers.

There is neither an association, nor a place of meeting which can allow the coolies to find work. They are day-labourers who constantly have to look for work. The coolies get up early in the morning and go to Devakottai in search of work. It is word of mouth which is the operative principle. The coolies go to a building site, and can be hired for a day or a few days. When the job is finished, they have to look again for another. Sometimes they come back to the village crestfallen: it means that it will be a day without work. The masons in the village can furnish information concerning their needs, but there are no strict rules on this subject.

There is not much else to say about coolie work except that, once again, it is particularly arduous. The loads they have to carry, all day long, on their heads are always heavy and, as we shall see later, the Paraiyars think that hell is a place where one has to carry stones on one's head in suffering. Coolie work is seen as a symbol of suffering: 'We are on earth to suffer, and this is why we have to carry bricks on our heads', is an often-heard expression. It is low caste work. During the drought of June 1981, the Udayars of Mullikundu worked as coolies, but they insisted on the fact that this was not their usual work. Coolie work is that of the toiling masses of India. While the Brahmans use their heads for thinking, the Harijans use theirs for carrying stones.

1.3) Agricultural labour: The first rains are expected in September. After the first showers, the fields are ploughed and many start sowing soon after. Unfortunately, the monsoon is often late. In 1981, it only came at the beginning of November and a lot of seeds were dried out, together with the soil. The Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam are not farmers by tradition, they are actually agricultural labourers. In India, the distinction is not without importance: farming is a noble occupation, while agricultural labourers simply carry out orders. Some farmer castes are not even allowed to plough land. For a few decades now, Harijans have been able to acquire a little land and have started farming it for themselves, but at Valghira Manickam these land-owners are only a small minority. Others rent a little land

from the Kallars, but they are always small plots and no villager can make a living exclusively, or even principally, from agriculture.

In Ramnad district, agriculture is a very limited activity and takes place from October to January. Most crops are 'dry', that is there is no irrigation. Hence few vegetables are grown apart from aubergines. In the village, the Paraiyars grow only cereals.

Agriculture requires little work. Ploughing is a relatively easy operation, despite the rudimentary nature of the ploughs used. The high farmer castes in the area are not subject to any prohibitions in this respect: they plough and sow the seed themselves. They use local manpower for weeding, which is done by women. There is then not much activity until harvesting. The irrigated growing of rice is first done in seed-beds. Once the plants have grown, teams of men gather them together in sheaves of a hundred which are transplanted by women.

Women also cut the ears which the men carry to the threshing-floor to be threshed by the men as well. We may mention here an interesting custom among the women: when they work in the fields, they place a piece of cloth on the road which runs next to the field. If someone comes along they road, the women make a characteristic clucking sound, and the passer-by has to put a coin on the piece of cloth. The money thus gathered is divided among the women workers at the end of the day.

We saw above that the Paraiyars from the village are not great farmers. Many fields never germinate. It should be said that the land rented to the Paraiyars by the Kallars is not of the first quality. It is often saline and the land owned by the Paraiyars is not much better. Only a few families are able to reap a good harvest. The others obtain a little rice or some other cereal, like *râgi* (millet). It is a plant which grows well. In the village, I do not think anything else is sown. The produce must be scanty. Fertilizers are almost unknown and the lack of rain can ruin a crop.

Agriculture is thus a relatively unimportant activity. Dry crops require little attention, and the agricultural season hardly lasts more than three months. This does not stop agriculture from enjoying great prestige. Even though land does not bring in much, the Paraiyars like to farm land; few families do indeed own land, but some others manage to rent a little land. The grains they can harvest constitute a very necessary complement to the resources of the family. For centuries,

the Paraiyars have accomplished the main agricultural tasks. The latter are, however, too limited to constitute a single profession. Today they are combined with other tasks, as must have been the case in the past. This is why we may call this sector of activity 'traditional'. Since a few decades ago, part of the population has managed to escape from such arduous labour, and take on professions which are more modern, or which, at least, were not traditionally accessible to the Paraiyars.

2) The Modern Sector

The professions in this sector of activity are less interesting as far as we are concerned, since they are often salaried professions without any distinguishing characteristic. We may none the less briefly go over them, to indicate their essential characteristics.

The municipal scavengers constitute, so to speak, a bridge between the two sectors, since the Paraiyars have taken advantage of their traditional occupation to hold modern jobs. Scavengers are relatively well paid and enjoy, in addition, important job security. This is therefore a godsend for the Paraiyars, all the more so since competition with the other castes is not very strong, scavenging being traditionally reserved to the Harijans and repugnant to the high castes. The profession is almost hereditary. If a municipal scavenger retires, his son, or another close relative, has priority in taking his place. Numerous such cases happened in the village: when Taïnis became a leper, since he had no children old enough, his wife took his place at the municipality. Raiyappan hopes to take his father's place some day since he has no work at the moment. When his father-in-law died, Manuel took over his job at the municipality.

The tasks of a scavenger are not very glorious; they constitute a kind of continuation of the untouchables' traditional work. Scavengers clean the streets, sprinkle insecticide, and gather the excrement of families who do not have lavatories. However, job security and reasonable wages make this profession an attractive one.

The same is true of other salaried professions in official institutions, like the Electricity Board. Here salaries are higher and work is more skilled, which gives even more prestige to these professions. We have seen that young people are attracted by these professions, and it is for this reason that they regularly accept employment in small workshops like those of printers. They do work which is not highly skilled and which is very badly paid, but they hope to better

their lot in this way. Three young men from the village worked in a spinning-mill at Karaikudi. Two of them earned less than three rupees a day, hardly enough to pay the bus-fare to Karaikudi. The third earned eight rupees. Working conditions are very hard, yet the factory attracts young people and some of them even go so far as to pay large bribes in order to be hired there for derisory wages. Many cannot take the strain and give up after a few years in frustration. Such jobs offer no job security and dismissal is the immediate reply to the slightest protest. Two young men who worked at a printer's had this unfortunate experience.

In these professions a certain unionization is to be found. There is a Communist union for the scavengers and all of them are members of it. The same is true of the other salaried workers. Although the unions are, in general, Communist, this does not mean that the workers adhere politically to this ideology. Many of the Communist unionists hold allegiance to the Congress Party. The striking fact about professional organizations is that they transcend caste divisions. Salaried workers often insist on the fact that there is no caste discrimination in their job. Modern society brings with it new affiliations which do not correspond to caste divisions, without necessarily contradicting them: life is thus partitioned into private and public life where caste tends to have less importance. It should be mentioned here that there are no unions for the brick-makers and coolies, who remain very divided and without any possibility of common action.

Cart-drivers are also grouped together by an association (*sangham*) which looks after their interests and fixes the prices of different trips. A cart-driver's work is worthwhile: he brings in a decent income, and the work is not too tiring since it is the coolies who load and unload the cart, while the cart-driver contents himself with driving it. For those with some capital, this constitutes a good alternative to the arduous work of brick-making.

The same is true of the work of a mason. It does not require a large investment, but it does mean some skilled knowledge. It takes a few years as an apprentice to become a mason. This is often done via a relative who accepts to train a young man. Few young people stand up to this apprenticeship, since the skin of the hands and feet is sorely tried, and many give up because of the pain. We have already described the essential features of a mason's work. It is necessary to distinguish between masons and their *maestris*. The latter

direct a group of masons and often take on 'contracts'. They earn a little more than simple masons. To be a *maestri*, it is necessary to know a lot of people in the area in order to obtain contracts. Masons work very regularly, except perhaps during October and November because of the slow-down in building activity.

G) Conclusions

We have now described the principal economic activities of the village. These activities may be divided into two main sectors: the traditional sector, which is still the dominant one, is a continuation of the activities of the past, though they have recently become monetary. The modern sector covers activities which, as far as the Paraiyars are concerned, appeared in the twentieth century. It is above all men who have started to go from one sector to the other. In the near future, there is little to make us think that there will be a massive movement from one sector to the other since there are few new economic opportunities at the moment. In addition, it is possible to imagine that the modernization of brick-making could have disastrous effects for Paraiyar workers. For the moment, the traditional sector still allows the majority to survive, and there are few signs of any major change taking place.

The Paraiyars' standard of living is extremely low. This brings with it a high infant mortality rate and precarious health among adults. During the rainy season, the situation gets even worse and reaches a critical level. The Paraiyárs are potential victims of any kind of economic accident, such as famine, which independent India has managed to avoid. We have not dwelt at length on the pitiful nature of the Paraiyar economy since the villagers themselves do not portray such a picture. They live normal lives, work, bring up their children, quarrel and sometimes relax. Behind this daily exterior, there is none the less the constant preoccupation with survival and food. The villagers do not earn sufficient income for their basic needs.

A fundamental characteristic of the traditional sector is the harshness of the tasks accomplished. The work is exhausting and saps the workers' strength little by little. When it is possible to avoid such work, people do not baulk at doing so: young people like to try their luck in the modern sector, and the wives of salaried workers stop working, if their husbands' salary allows it. Among the Pallars, it is sometimes the men who stop working, or who become cart-drivers.

Able to live with little, the Paraiyars make do with little, and have no incentive to work more. The agents of the Madras employers come back with a small amount of money which allows them to survive during the rainy season. Very few work to improve their standard of living, content with the little they have. It is not a question of laziness, but is an understandable reaction: people do not accept going to hell unless they are obliged to.

A last remark is necessary before ending this chapter. One of the striking features of Paraiyar economy is the low importance of caste. Economic relations between the Paraiyars and the outside world are not modelled solely on caste. This partly explains the relatively privileged nature of the village of Valghira Manickam which is an independent locality. The relationship between employers and employees has thus a tendency to become purely contractual. It would however be incorrect to claim that caste has completely disappeared from economic life. In the first place, it still explains the general economic level of the village: the traditional sector does not constitute a break with the past. There is little chance, for example, that a Vellalar village could be made up of brick-makers. As regards the Harijans, they have largely remained in working-class professions and their economic situation is still very low. The Christians do not have access to the various privileges granted to the Harijans, which makes their situation even more difficult. Finally, special relationships continue to exist with neighbouring high castes. These questions will be the subject of the next chapter, which will be entirely devoted to the question of caste.

4. Caste and Dependence

In the preceding chapters, the question of caste has not featured a great deal. We have, it is true, noted the various communities which make up the village, but we have spoken little of the specific institutions of each community, of the relationships between them and of the differences which divide them. We saw in the last chapter that caste is not really the dominant economic institution. To be sure, it explains the economic level of the village, and the nature of the professions followed by its inhabitants. However, in the village there is no real 'caste system': the traditional caste order was broken by the very founding of the village. An independent village made up solely of untouchables is a novel phenomenon which breaks the traditional state of balance between the castes. As we shall see, all the traditional obligations have been abandoned and the Paraiyars gain a little more independence every day. Economic relationships have a tendency to become free of caste. Yet the untouchables remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy as much from an economic and political point of view, as from a general social point of view. It would therefore be false to say that caste, by losing some of its meanings, has completely disappeared; quite the contrary. Srinivas (1971) has shown, for example, that caste can sometimes even be reinforced under the influence of the various advantages granted to the so-called 'backward' castes. The vitality of endogamy, an institution which has never been questioned during this century, is a brilliant example. On the other hand, it seems to me that certain traditional aspects of caste have undergone acute transformations. Interdependence between castes becomes less and less a reality. The notions of ritual purity are also receding and, against what Dumont suggests, *caste* has a tendency to make a life for itself outside the *caste system*.

The transformation of caste will be one of the essential points in this chapter. One of the most interesting questions thus concerns the recent evolution of untouchability and the dependence of the untouchables on the high castes. What becomes of these two concepts in an independent village like Valghira Manickam? Are the domination of the high castes and the various discriminations to which the untouchables are generally subject still operative in such a context? Actually, in this very question resides the essential point of this chapter which will attempt, among other things, to provide information on the Paraiyar caste, their conception of the *caste* system and their attitude towards untouchability.

A) The Untouchables and the Caste System

It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that the untouchables have been *relatively* neglected in the social anthropology of India. Their major economic problems have attracted the attention of social reformers more than that of anthropologists and the difficulty of getting close to them has only made the problem worse. An anthropologist used to be unable to settle in an untouchables' hamlet without the consent of the high castes which dominated it. However, it would be wrong to think that nothing has been said about them. There are in fact many works about the untouchables, but the most remarkable studies of the last thirty years deal rather with the high castes, and it is symptomatic to note that Srinivas, Dumont, Pocock and Béteille have written relatively little on the subject of the untouchables. Moffatt's recent study (1979) is therefore particularly welcome. It has the merit of tackling the question as to how the caste system is experienced by those who are its principal victims. Moffatt's study is the first systematic approach to this problem, and it is necessary to say a word about it. But before doing so, we shall see briefly how the untouchables have been perceived by caste theorists.

1) Traditional Views Concerning the Untouchables

The main theories of the caste system have given differing degrees of attention to the untouchables, but few have dealt with the problem of untouchability in depth. A great number of specialists have insisted on the integration of the untouchables in the caste system and have thus put the accent on the state of balance, or even, the harmony of

the system. However, it must not be forgotten that the untouchables are *also* outside the system and are rejected on all sides. This is what the abbé Dubois, who was probably—at the beginning of the twentieth century—the first writer to have made an in-depth study of Indian society, correctly underlined. Dubois had correctly brought out the structural position of the untouchables as opposed to the Brahmans, but he also noted what could be called the 'paradoxical marginality' of the untouchables. He writes, for example, 'It is painful to think that its members, though so degraded, are yet the most useful of all' (1906: 49). The untouchables are thus socially excluded but economically indispensable. The expression is rather appropriate since it expresses the ambiguity of the untouchables' position which is at the same time inside and outside the system. This double aspect strikes me as being essential, but it has too often been neglected by the authors who have insisted on one or another of these characteristics without however showing their interrelationship.

Senart (1975), for example, speaks little of the untouchables whose position does not seem to him to be in any way peculiar. It is to be explained, according to this French Sanskrit scholar, as an illustration of the rules of purity which characterize Indian society. Impurity is communicated by certain things and also by certain people. The untouchables are thus simply people in a permanent state of impurity. These remarks underlie Senart's theory which does not accord a special place to the untouchables. His writings are based on sacred texts which speak little of the *Chandalas*, as the untouchables used to be called.

Whereas Senart's theory puts the accent on the participation of the untouchables in the system, Max Weber takes up the idea which we have called 'paradoxical marginality'. The untouchables of India belong to what Weber calls, in a somewhat unfortunate manner, the 'pariah people'. The 'pariah people' are contrasted with tribals as being populations which are economically integrated, and even indispensable, but socially rejected. The untouchables are thus both inside and outside society and religion. The question that Weber then asks is that of the legitimization of the system, that is to say: how was the system able to maintain such remarkable stability and avoid rebellion on behalf of those who were oppressed by it? According to Weber, revolts against the caste system were rare, even though, for this German sociologist, the means of coercion which had been

established were relatively limited. Again according to Weber, it is the integration of dominant values by the underprivileged strata which explains this stability:

> The internalization of the Hindu order by underprivileged strata, guest and pariah tribes, represents the adjustment of socially weak strata to the given caste order—the legitimation of their social and economic situation (1958: 41).

The untouchables accept the system because they themselves play the game, and because they reproduce for their own use the values and institutions which dominate them. We shall see later that this explanation is followed by various scholars, such as Dumont and Moffatt, but we may note here that it constitutes one of the essential characteristics of caste society, which is permeated at all levels by hierarchy. However, by putting the accent on integration, this explanation sometimes leaves to one side the other aspect of untouchability, which is exclusion from the social system. We shall have to come back to this problem later on.

Bouglé (1969) did not feel at all concerned by the problem of the untouchables. They are almost absent from his famous *Essai sur le régime des castes* and only appear in it as mere counterparts of the Brahmans. Blunt (1969) saw the problem in the same fashion, since the question of untouchability is considered by him to be simply a particular aspect of the larger question of pollution.

Our knowledge about untouchability thus remained stagnant until the beginning of the twentieth century. To the general considerations we have mentioned should be added the extraordinary compilations, made by British officials, often linked to census-taking, which provide a kind of catalogue of all the castes and tribes of India. Such compilations are available for every region of India (see, for example, Iyer 1981, Thurston 1909, Enthoven 1922, Russel & Lal 1975, etc.). They had the merit of gathering together important empirical material about the Indian peoples, including the untouchables. Apart from missionary activity, these census-takings were an opportunity for first contacts with the untouchables. Unfortunately, the information collected does not always have the scientific rigour which could be hoped for, and these works are often simply long lists of cultural characteristics.

Ghurye (1969, first published in 1932), on the other hand, brought new life to Indian sociology. He tackles new themes, such

as contemporary changes in the caste system, and therefore naturally takes an interest in the untouchables and more especially in their present-day condition. This new light leads Ghurye, of course, to put the accent on the exclusion of the untouchables, that is to say, on the discrimination of which they are victims, and the various prohibitions to which they are subject. Ghurye even describes a whole series of violent acts which struck them in the 1860s (1969: 329-35) and which are still common. Ghurye thus insists more on rejection than integration, paving the way for a whole movement which feels itself to be concerned with the social aspect of the problem of untouchability.

The caste theory proposed by Hutton (1973) is more conventional. Once again, untouchability is seen as a general consequence of the theory of purity. The untouchables are impure in a permanent fashion because they accept to eat beef. Hutton thus follows the line of thinking which underlines this structural aspect of caste, but he notes the intolerable discriminations to which the untouchables are subject and which constitute, according to him, a regrettable aspect of the caste system and an aberration.

The most complete study of the caste system is certainly that of Louis Dumont which has had a great influence on recent studies on Indian society. Untouchability does not really constitute a question apart for Dumont, neither is it possible to separate untouchability from the more general question of purity and hierarchy. The Brahman/untouchable dichotomy is an expression of the opposition between the pure and the impure which is the foundation of the whole system. A certain kind of impurity is made permanent by specialization in impure tasks. The untouchable's position is thus the counterpart of the Brahman's superiority. For Dumont, caste society forms a system and it is not possible to separate the untouchables from this system. Secondly, untouchability is reproduced by the untouchables themselves since the hierarchical principle permeates the whole of society and all its institutions; the untouchables do not oppose this system into which they are integrated and which they reproduce elsewhere.

As may be seen, the main theorists of the caste system have essentially considered the untouchables as being part of the caste system and have taken into consideration their marginality to a relatively small degree. It should be noted that the empirical material on the

untouchables did not go much further than the catalogues of the 'Castes and Tribes' kind for a long time. In 1920, Briggs published a study on the Chamars of North India, one of the largest untouchable castes. A desire for scientific objectivity makes this work very useful, despite the outmoded analysis. This remark also applies to another major monograph on caste published in 1950 by Fuchs, and which deals with the Balahis of Central India (Nimar). This is also an important source of information, but the authors do not discuss at length the position of these castes within the system. The numerous monograph studies of villages published after 1950 yet again increased the empirical material at our disposal, since they provide, in a more or less detailed form, the life of the untouchable quarters in the rural system.

Several anthropologists also undertook monograph studies of villages, or even untouchable castes, such as Cohn (1969), Zelliott (1970) or Patwardhan (1973), etc. In 1972, J.M. Mahar edited a remarkable collection of articles on the untouchables of India which constitutes an indispensable tool. The political aspect of the problem has particularly held scholarly attention, just as has the whole problem of social change. For example, the studies of Lynch (1969, 1972) and Isaacs (1964). Isaacs' work has particular bearing on the difficulties encountered by the untouchables in finding a place in contemporary Indian society. Unlike caste-system theorists, these authors have been led to put the accent on the exclusion of the Harijans. Doubtless this is also true of Béteille who underlines, for example (1969: 91), that the lifestyle and religious observance of the untouchables are different from what is to be found in the high castes. In addition, Béteille notes (1972: 413) that there is always a share of hostility and resentment on the untouchables' behalf towards the high castes, even though, as the author correctly states, the lower social strata of India 'accept' better than elsewhere their condition. Militant literature has had a tendency to deny this last fact and has only taken up the theme of the opposition between the inferior and superior castes. A book by Von der Weid and Poitevin expresses this tendency to such an exaggerated degree that it leads them to claim:

> These Harijans consider themselves as forming a socio-economic group, a homogeneous and well-defined class as opposed to high-caste landowners (1978: 192).

This is wishful thinking, since the Harijans have never acted in a 'homogeneous and well-defined' manner. The authors know Tamil reality well and the very marked differences between the Sakkilyars, the Pallars and the Paraiyars prove that the Harijans in no way consider themselves as a socio-economic group. We shall have the opportunity to come back to this point soon.

It is thus possible to think that a certain number of recent studies have favoured the point of view of the opposition between the untouchables and the caste system. This tendency is to be found in the work of Gough for whom the Pallars of Tanjore show a 'fanatical insistence on equality' (1960: 44). For these authors, the untouchables do not therefore accept the caste system and its values. Even an author like Srinivas insisted on the difference between the small and the great tradition in India. It is clear that the recent historical struggles against the caste system have inspired these authors to underline the difference which exists between high and low castes in India.

2) Moffatt's Study

Moffatt's study is very much to the point here. It certainly has the merit of stating the problem clearly and it is the first time that a study is devoted to the question of the untouchables within the caste system. In addition, Moffatt's work is based on fieldwork among the Paraiyars of Tamil Nadu (in Chingleput district, quite far away from Ramnad) and for this double reason, it merits a few words on our behalf.

Unlike the recent studies which we have just gone over, Moffatt avoids what he calls 'diversity models' or 'outcaste models'. For him, there are no cultural forms which are specific to the untouchables. The untouchables do not possess a separate sub-culture. Their modes of action and thought are exactly the same as those of the rest of the Indian population. Far from questioning the dominant social order, the untouchables re-create amongst themselves a microcosm of the global system. There is therefore a cultural consensus between the untouchables and the dominant social order. Such is the book's argument (1979: 3), which thus shows that instead of opposing the system, the untouchables reproduce it and 'recreate among themselves the complete set of institutions and status relationships from which they have been excluded by the high castes for reason of their extreme inferiority'. In other words, Moffatt takes up again Weber's ideas about the legitimization of Indian social order, but he also

extends them, since he states that not content with internalizing the essential values of Indian society, the untouchables reproduce among themselves a microcosm of the system. Finally, he subscribes to Dumont's idea according to which Brahmans and untouchables occupy complementary positions, which are almost inseparable, in the Indian hierarchy.

Our aim is not to summarize Moffatt's book exhaustively here, but simply to give an outline of its main ideas. Moffatt's work is based on fieldwork in a village, called for the circumstance, Endavur, in Chingleput district, in east Tamil Nadu. The untouchables form a large colony (*cêri*) where the Paraiyars, who are the majority among the untouchables of eastern Tamil Nadu, are dominant. The Reddyars, an important peasant caste, are dominant in the village properly speaking (*ûr*), that is to say the settlement to which the *cêri* is attached. Traditionally, the untouchables cultivate the Reddyars' land by tenure, and accomplish the various obligations which are due to this caste. The caste system is still very vigorous in Endavur, where the untouchables continue to accomplish their traditional duties and are still victims of the usual discrimination. For Moffatt, the matter is clear since the structural response of the untouchables to their exclusion is what he calls 'replication', that is to say:

> The Untouchables recreate among themselves virtually every relation and institution from which they have been excluded for reason of their untouchability (1979: 89).

Here we get to the very heart of Moffatt's analysis, which thus aims to show that the untouchables are not capable of setting up alternative cultural forms as opposed to those of the caste system. Quite on the contrary:

> The Untouchables of Endavur replicate among themselves, to the best of their materially limited abilities, almost every relationship from which they have been excluded by the *ûr* castes. And this replicatory order is constructed in the same cultural code that marks highness and lowness, purity and impurity, superordination and subordination, among the high castes. It thus implies among the lowest castes of Endavur a deep cultural consensus on the cognitive and evaluative assumptions of the system as a whole (ibid.: 98).

The text quoted is radical since, according to Moffatt, the untouchables have accepted practically all the values and institutions of the

high castes with whom they enter into a relationship called 'cultural consensus'. In order to give support to his hypothesis, Moffatt has discovered a remarkable system among the untouchables. It is known that the 'service castes', that is to say the priests, the washermen, the barbers, etc. refuse to serve the untouchables. No matter, the Harijans of Chingleput have their own castes which reproduce these functions for themselves alone. In other words, there exists, for example, a sub-caste of untouchable priests who officiate only for the untouchables. Better still, these sub-castes are themselves hierarchized and respect the main rules of untouchability found at the higher level. The case is unusual and merits some attention.

Among the untouchables, the Vallunar Pandaram caste is the highest. They are the 'Brahmans of the untouchables' since its members are traditionally the priests of the impure castes. They are considered to be purer than the other Harijans, abstain from beef and are vegetarians four times a year. They are endogamous, just as the other castes are elsewhere. The Paraiyars come next in the untouchable hierarchy of the village. They hold a similar position in the *céri* to that of the Reddyars in the village: they control most of the resources, have the only active caste council and are also the majority, numerically speaking. The Harijan Vannans, or washermen, are inferior to the latter. They are considered to be highly polluting by the high castes since they handle the pollution of the polluted. They wash the untouchables' clothes and accomplish the same ritual functions as the pure Vannans for the high castes: they wash the clothes of the first menstruation, set up the coffin at funerals, look after the decorations for wedding feasts, etc. They are also the ritual barbers even though they do not cut hair. The Valluvar Pandarams refuse to officiate for them. The Sakkilyars, one of the largest untouchable castes of Tamil Nadu, are only represented at Endavur by three families whose social status is very low. The Paraiyars do not even go into their road, for fear of being polluted and claim that the Sakkilyars pollute them by mere touch. Their degraded status is due to the fact that they handle dead cows and leather—the Sakkilyars are the tanners of Tamil Nadu. Even below them are the Kurivikarans, who are considered particularly low because they eat crows. They reproduce the role which the untouchables play with respect to the village: that of the poor who come to be fed at festivals and auspicious events in order to obtain merit for those who feed them. They are

fortune-tellers and beggars and wear coloured clothes different from other Tamils.

Critical consciousness of the caste system is thus almost totally absent among the untouchables who, on the contrary, are very finicky about their position in the hierarchy. 'Replication' among the untouchables does not stop here. As Louis Dumont showed, the hierarchical principles of the caste system permeate all social relationships, and they are therefore to be found within the caste itself, which is also divided into hierarchized sections. The Paraiyars of Endavur are part of the Sangu sub-caste which is endogamous. Within this sub-caste are to be found divisions, called *vakaiyaras*, which have different statuses. Marriages are contracted both inside and outside the *vakaiyaras*. The Talayaris deem themselves to be the most superior and it is among them that the head of the caste is to be found. The Panaikkars, who come next, are proud when they marry with the Talayaris. The majority of servants are found among the Vettiyans. The Talayaris and the Panaikkars claim superiority with respect to the Vettiyans who carry out all the polluting tasks accomplished by the Paraiyars. However, the Vettiyans marry with other divisions since, in a sample of 73 marriages, only 36 took place within the *vakaiyara*. Nineteen marriages occurred between Vettiyans and Talayaris.

Thus, this replication of the caste system does indeed take place within the main untouchable caste of the village, and this can only further confirm Moffatt's views. The last chapter of his book deals with religion, but the arguments only have a minimal bearing on the general theme of the book, and we need not mention them here, except to recall that, as in the human sphere, the supernatural world of Endavur is divided into pure and impure beings.

3) Critical Appraisal and Synthesis

Moffatt has thus clearly shown the way in which the untouchables have internalized the essential values and institutions of the caste system. On the main points, his approach seems to me to be faultless. Everywhere in India are to be found castes, sub-castes and untouchable sections of the population which are more or less hierarchized and which apply to their inferiors the principal forms of untouchability. The criteria of gradation are often the same as those used by the high castes, such as the use or non-use of a meat diet, the kinds of meat tolerated by the caste, the type of traditional work,

etc. In Tamil Nadu, for example, a Paraiyar invariably considers himself superior to a Sakkilyar. The differences which exist between subcastes and, above all, between castes are still deep-rooted. It is, for example, unthinkable to imagine marriages between Pallars and Paraiyars. Further still, a caste which desires to raise its status will use the traditional criteria of high status to justify its ambitions: it will stop eating beef, or better still any meat, will avoid any contact with those who still practise such degrading acts, will scrupulously follow the various observances linked to ritual purity, will adopt the exterior signs of the high castes, such as the sacred thread of the Brahmans, etc. This is what Srinivas has called 'Sanskritization'. In this process of social change, the castes which contest their position in the established order reinforce hierarchy even more by showing a greater orthodoxy and by adopting Brahman observances. This phenomenon is universal in India. In the twentieth century, there has not been a single inferior caste which has raised its status by contesting the principles of the system. On the contrary, they have integrated these principles in order to show that their claims were justified. One can thus observe that economic progression can be accompanied by greater religious orthodoxy. There is no point in going further in this direction, since the debate is somewhat outside the sphere of our subject and we can content ourselves with noting that Moffatt's hypothesis, as it has been outlined in the quotations given above, is acceptable in its main points.

Despite this, Moffatt's study remains limited and certainly calls for some comments which we shall briefly make. In the first place, Moffatt considers the system outside of time. Listening to him, it could be possible to think that the village of Endavur lives outside History. He tells us that the caste system is still very vibrant and hence gives us an ideal, almost classical, image. In fact, things have changed. Even though the relationships between castes are still strictly codified, it becomes apparent from reading the study that the Paraiyars are less submissive to the high castes than in the past. For example, they contested the established order on a number of occasions. In the 1960s, they unilaterally decided to introduce a request for the building of a proper road between the *cêri* and the village. For this, they did not deem it necessary to appeal to the head of the Reddyars without whom they could not normally undertake anything. The Reddyars therefore opposed the project and a quarrel put the

two communities in opposition. The Paraiyars entered a lawsuit against the Reddyars, but finally a compromise was made. The established order was respected, but it was seriously shaken. K.T.R., the head of the Reddyars, a rich land-owner, had been soundly beaten during the parliamentary elections and rumour has it that even the inhabitants of his village had voted against him. In addition, untouchability seems to be receding at Endavur, as Moffatt suggests himself (see p. 83). For example, the Harijans can walk in the streets of the village and drink water at the municipal tap. Recently, a Harijan even publicly insulted a Mudalyar (a local high caste) who had ill-treated him. Such behaviour would have been unthinkable in the past and so we see that there are signs of change inside the village. Moffatt keeps to a description of a sort of ideal model or type, but things are less clear-cut than what appears in his conclusions. Today, there are Harijans, notably those who are militants in untouchable organizations, who have many alternative solutions to propose, even if they do not always oppose the caste system as such. In addition, we have every reason to believe that the inferior castes have never accepted their inferior condition, even if they reproduced the same system in their own favour with respect to their inferiors, as Moffatt has correctly shown. Their myths of origin express this fact very well, and the Harijans have often seized the opportunities of rising socially, such as, for example, by means of conversion. Today, you have to look far afield to find a Harijan who considers himself to be impure. The authors who have defended the idea of the perfect integration of the untouchables into the caste system have, to my way of thinking, somewhat underestimated the importance of repression in maintaining the system, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the complete economic dependence of the Harijans who had little scope for action. Still today, in rural areas, the slightest protest by the Harijans can have dramatically repressive consequences on the part of the high castes, and the daily occurrences of what are generally called 'atrocities towards the Harijans' are there to bear witness to this. There is no reason why things should have been different in the past. Secondly, the economic dependence of the untouchables, linked to the fact of their being broken up into small groups, limited their possibilities for action even more. They therefore had no alternative but to submit to the system and try to draw out the few advantages and little prestige that they were able to.

This naturally brings us to consider the attitude of the untouchables towards untouchability. Moffatt shows, in this context, that the untouchables themselves have respected untouchability with regard to inferior castes, and this fact is undeniable, as we have said. But this does not mean that they have accepted their own untouchability and, in many cases, they are violently opposed to it. The struggle which the untouchables of Tamil Nadu are waging today is still full of this ambiguity. For example, it is not unusual to meet a Pallar, who is a militant in an organization which defends the interests of the untouchables, but who claims that the Paraiyars are his inferiors. It thus seems to me that the hierarchical order is never accepted, as such, by those who are put to a disadvantage by it, even if they do not question the idea of hierarchy itself. The untouchables easily accept untouchability for others, but less easily for themselves.

In this context, there is another important remark to be made concerning Moffatt's study. The main criticism that can be made of his work is an epistemological one. Moffatt is, in fact, hardly convincing as far as the illustrations given for his hypothesis are concerned. He never distinguishes the difference which exists between the verbal representations made by his subjects and their objective practice. In point of fact, the difference is crucial. There are few who consider themselves to be fundamentally bad. However, it is necessary to take care not to confuse judgement of oneself with what is really practised. This is true of the untouchables: asking an Indian if he eats beef amounts to asking him if he is an inferior, disgusting and contemptible being. In nine cases out of ten, the untouchables will deny such a practice, even if they do in fact eat beef. I was able to observe this truth on numerous occasions: at Valghira Manickam, most Paraiyars deny eating beef, but I knew the person who regularly supplied them with this meat, and I was told several times that all the families occasionally ate it. But to admit to it to a stranger would amount to admitting to be inferior. The same reasoning applies to respecting the rules of untouchability. Many Pallars claim, in an anthropologist's presence, that they never accept water from a Paraiyar, but the anthropologist will not fail to observe, in the course of his fieldwork, the numerous cases where Pallars ask for a glass of water from a Paraiyar family. The Pallars' initial statement proves, at the most, that the Pallar is conscious of the importance of this criterion for his interlocutor and that, by saying this, he intends giving

a respectable image of his caste. It is therefore necessary not to confuse experience with a representation of this experience. I hence regret that Moffatt did not make a greater distinction between these two levels of knowledge. However, there is no need to exaggerate the opposite point of view, and claim that the untouchables are totally indifferent to the rules of pollution, but they do seem to me to be more flexible among the untouchables, less deep-rooted and less omnipresent. Moffatt certainly exaggerates in implying that the Paraiyars show the same orthodoxy as the Brahmans. There is quite clearly a difference between the 'Small and the Great Tradition' in India and the concept of Sanskritization is precisely there to recall its existence, since it indicates the fact of passing from one to the other.

One of the fundamental differences which constitute the opposition between the two 'traditions' certainly concerns the observance of the rules of purity. This observance is scrupulous and obsessive among the Brahmans whose lives, down to the smallest act, are governed by attention to purity; this is not so among the untouchables. *A relative* unconcern regarding ritual questions may be observed, and the whole of the present study argues in this direction. The Paraiyars often know the Brahmanic rites but they do not respect them much. For example, during menstruation, a woman Paraiyar will cook, work, go and fetch water, cut wood, and in a word, live normally among the others despite the threats of the demons. In the same way, the various rules concerning ritual pollution are observed in a fashion which is, to say the least, dilettantish. For example, after childbirth, a woman is not really secluded and isolated; at the most one insists on the need for rest and not working for a few days. The differences between Sakkilyars and Paraiyars are often expressed in terms which are more secular than ritual: 'It is the Brahmans who have divided us like this' is an often-heard phrase and 'we are inferior by tradition', etc. Hence people do not like giving a daughter to a Vellalar any more than to a Sakkilyar. Endogamy is therefore not simply a question of purity. For the Christians, the preoccupation with ritual is weaker, but I have every reason to believe that the Hindus of Valghira Manickam are not greatly concerned with the question of ritual purity, even though certain people say the contrary.

It would be wrong to conclude from what has just been written that the untouchables are totally indifferent to questions concerning pollution. It simply strikes me as evident that these questions are less

the object of strict observance than, for example, among the Brahmans. In the same way, the differences between the untouchable castes are very marked, as Moffatt very justly underlined. None the less, here as well, this truth cannot hide the fact that, in certain circumstances, the Harijans of whatever caste are capable of common action, notably against the high castes. This tendency is becoming more and more clear in India and those involved say so themselves to all and sundry. Thus, even when serious divisions place the various untouchable castes in opposition to each other, they are capable of uniting together against an outside aggression. A *Harijan consciousness* has come into effective being. Nothing proves that it did not already exist in the past, but it had fewer opportunities to be expressed since repression was more severe and the untouchables had few means for struggle at their disposal. Today, an untouchable candidate for election can obtain votes from all the untouchable castes. A Hindu Paraiyar told me that he would be pleased to vote for the father of an untouchable doctor from Devakottai should he stand in the elections for the panchayat, as the rumour led people to believe; for this man, it was above all necessary to vote for a Harijan candidate. As far as the Christians are concerned, I am less affirmative since their status is somewhat different. They do not belong to the Scheduled castes nor to the untouchable organizations, so that Harijan consciousness is reduced to a bare minimum among them, as we shall see later on. None the less, the untouchables do not think that the discriminations of which they are victims are justified. Their myths of origin, which explain their condition as having been caused by a mistake, a swindle or a blunder do indeed bear witness to the fact that they reject such discrimination, as we shall see further on.

It thus appears that Moffatt's ideas, despite their indisputable merits, have to be nuanced, all the more so since the untouchable service castes like the Valluvar Pandarams and the Harijan Vannans are not found everywhere in Tamil Nadu. At Valghira Manickam, for example, the Paraiyars themselves accomplish the priestly functions and the various ritual tasks which are incumbent on barbers and washermen. The case studied by Moffatt is thus somewhat remarkable. In addition, the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam are not divided into hierarchized sections like the *vakaiyaras* of Endavur. On the contrary, there exists an absolute equality between the diverse lineages which are in fact very little structured.

It is useful to recall what we said at the beginning of this section. The untouchables occupy an ambiguous position with respect to the caste system. Their conformity with the system cannot be considered as complete, even if Max Weber was to a large extent right in underlining the fact that the 'pariahs' had internalized Hindu order. Having said this, the interests of the untouchables have often been opposed to the system and there has always been a will for social mobility on behalf of the underprivileged, who have never accepted their own position in the system, even if they do not question the system often. Oppositions to the system, like the Lingayat sects which contest caste hierarchy, ended up by being absorbed by the system. While subscribing to Moffatt's views, it is clear now that certain conclusions have to be redefined. The untouchables of India do indeed reproduce for themselves the main cultural forms of the caste system, but this reproduction is more flexible and less orthodox. It is only when a marked social ascent takes place that orthodoxy becomes greater.

The relative exclusion of the untouchables appears at all levels. The practices and customs of the Harijans are sometimes completely opposite to those of the Brahmans and the following list gives an outline of them:

	Brahmans	Untouchables
Marriage	• unique and indissoluble	• frequent divorce
	• religious	• civil
	• no extramarital sex	• sexual freedom
	• dowry, *Kanya Dan*	• bride-price
	• no remarriage of widows	• remarriage of widows authorized
	• child marriage	• marriage later on
Diet	• strictly vegetarian	• eating of all meat and beef
	• no eggs	• eating of carrion
Religion	• vegetarian gods	• carnivorous gods and demons
	• Sanskrit tradition	• popular religion, village cult

	• worship	• pragmatic religion, based on the satisfaction of immediate needs
	• regular and complicated rites	• no regular prayers, no cult
	• great insistence on purity	• permanent impurity
Economy	• intellectual work	• manual work
	• tilling land prohibited	• study prohibited
Exterior signs/ privileges	• sacred thread • gold jewellery • topknot • parasol, shoes, traditional clothes, etc.	• all these privileges are prohibited; also covering the head and chest, wearing clothes beneath the knee, etc.

This table is, of course, not exhaustive and, in addition, represents ideal models: certain Brahmans, for example, have the right to till land and certain untouchables forbid their widows to remarry. But, generally speaking, the two communities tend to conform to each of these two lists. Furthermore, the intermediary castes also tend to approximate one of the two ideal models according to their position in the hierarchy. It is thus possible to imagine a sort of continuum between the two poles, where the process of Sanskritization would appear as the driving force of the continuum. This process consists precisely of abandoning most of the inferior practices, in order to adopt those of the other column and thus conform to the Brahmanic ideal.

The table above appears as a series of oppositions which could, in fact, be extended to other sectors of social life. For example, a high-caste family will tend to be more extended, while among the untouchables it is reduced to a bare minimum. Authority is more in evidence among the Brahmans who also show more respect to their forebears. None of this exists among the untouchables, who are still divided and incapable of common action. In addition, each of the terms in this table is full of value judgements: for example, in India, the prohibition on remarriage of widows is charged with a positive value, since it is part of Brahmanic tradition. In the same fashion, the payment of the bride-price for marriage is considered as negative, just as meat-eating is. There is hence a certain opposition between the untouchable and Brahmanic life-styles. There is no total conformity.

The opposition between the two poles is not absolute since the first constitutes an attraction for the second, but the importance of these characteristics should be carefully noted. In addition, the process of Sanskritization was not accessible to the untouchables. Even today, the use of a parasol or a horse by untouchables at a wedding can provoke riots and murders on the part of the high castes who are jealous of their privileges. Everything leads us to believe that things were considerably more virulent in the past.

We have deviated a little from Moffatt's hypothesis which concerns the untouchables with respect to the caste system. None the less, the table clearly shows that the untouchables could never completely conform to the system, nor even reproduce all its institutions which were often forbidden them. In addition, there was not always a relationship of economic dependence between the different untouchable castes, nor even political domination. At Endavur, the Paraiyars own the land today and hence control part of the resources. This, however, is a recent situation and somewhat unusual. Usually, the Paraiyars lived, and still live, in the same state of subjection as the Sakkilyars. I am not sure that their ritual superiority is translated into economic terms. It is possible, but not certain.

The whole problem of grasping the position of the untouchables in the caste system thus stems from the very ambiguity of their position. Though rejected from the system, the untouchables none the less accomplish those economic functions which are essential to the survival of the system. One might say that they are sometimes inside and sometimes outside. They enter into the system in order to accomplish their ritual and economic obligations, that is to say agricultural work and scavenging, tasks concerned with the dead and evil spirits (grave-digging, playing drums at funerals, etc.). They leave it again in order to go back to their colonies where they are denied access to the village. It is significant that in many cases, they are only authorized to go into the village in order to carry out their various tasks. This is also true at Kanda Devi. Hence an untouchable only enters into the community in order to remove from it its impurities which he takes with him. The attitude of the untouchables clearly reflects this ambiguity: they wish to improve their lot while at the same time scorning their fellows; the prestigious practices and institutions of the high castes being forbidden them, they nevertheless reproduce the inequalities of which they are victims. The

untouchables' ideology is thus a non-egalitarian one after the fashion of that of the high castes. Thus, while we cannot say, with Gough, that they show proof of a fanatical insistence on equality, Dumont's view, according to which hierarchy permeates *all* social relationships, does not seem to me to be confirmed at Valghira Manickam, where lineages are not hierarchized. Inside the caste, a certain equality does indeed reign and this equality is maintained as much as possible; there is no leadership at Valghira Manickam and the few religious representatives are constantly humbled and made fun of. The process of Sanskritization clearly expresses the ambiguity of the untouchables' position since it marks the fact of passing from one state to another and, at the same time, it implies no break whatever, but rather a continuity between these states and therefore does indeed take place within the system.

Insistence on the integration of the untouchables into the caste system and their acceptance of its essential values must therefore not let us lose sight of the fact that they are also excluded from the borders of the system. They are at the same time the victims and the agents of the system, its enemies and its defenders. Neither should one neglect, as Weber does, the strength of repression which was used against them in case of rebellion. In addition, all the witnesses confirm that they were, until recently, in a state of truly remarkable poverty and degradation. Continually harassed by want and obliged to beg in order to have water and food, they had neither the strength nor the ability to organize themselves. Even today, their economic situation is far from enviable. The inhabitants of Valghira Manickam still feel very strongly this inability to act.

The Harijans are only untouchable with respect to the 'touchables'. They are necessary to the system, the impurities of which they canalize. Unlike the tribes of India which lead independent lives, the untouchables do not have an existence which is independent of the caste system, of which they are a part, even though they are also excluded from it.

B) The Internal Organization of the Paraiyars

It is now time to come back to the reality of Valghira Manickam, where the Paraiyars constitute the main community. It is therefore this caste which will be the object of the second part of this chapter. After some general considerations, we shall study the make-up of the

caste, its mythology, its internal divisions and the relationships between Hindus and Christians. As we shall see, caste constitutes a sociologically poor concept among the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam. It is little structured, but takes on great importance in the life of the village.

1) General Considerations

Our aim here is not to retrace the history and origins of the Paraiyars. Those who are interested by the question can consult works like that of Thurston (1909) or Iyer (1981) who gathered the information available at the beginning of the century; however, the origin of this information is sometimes doubtful. As far as the origins of the Paraiyars are concerned, we shall have to make do with conjectures, since the ancient texts make little case of these wretched people who were just good enough for collecting refuse. We know that a few untouchables like the holy Nandan took an active part in the bhakti movement, which is a form of devotionalism according to which the personal worship of God is more important than birth, or respect for Brahmanic ritual. The bhakti movement was perhaps less revolutionary than some have claimed, and it seems that it was the Sudra high castes, like the Vellalars, who took advantage of it (Stein 1968: 84).

The untouchables' condition remained wretched for centuries and it was not until British colonization that the first notable changes became visible. Some untouchables managed to acquire land and legislation finally started to protect them, even if their lot did not change radically.

The Paraiyars constitute one of the big untouchable castes of Tamil Nadu. The 'Census'[3] is not very clear on this subject since it gives a category of Adi-Dravidas which comprises 2,547,166 individuals out of a total population of 7,315,595 untouchables. In fact, the term Adi-Dravida is a generic one and does not denote a caste. It is often used to designate the Paraiyars, as for example in the archdiocese of Madurai. The Paraiyars, as such, make up, according to the same census in 1971, the second largest untouchable community of Tamil Nadu, with 1,533,482 individuals, that is to say 21 per cent of the untouchables. The Pallars come next with 1,326,745 members, as compared with the Sakkilyars who number 841,842. They are therefore very large communities who represent an important proportion

[3]Census of India, 1971, *Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.*

of the total population. In Tamil Nadu, the untouchables constitute nearly 18 per cent of a population which counted 48 million people in 1981.

Although these three big untouchable castes are found throughout Tamil Nadu, each of them is none the less concentrated in a specific territory. The Paraiyars are, in a large majority, found in the east of the state, in the Arcot, Chingleput and Tanjore districts. The Pallars are numerically predominant in the south, that is in the Tirunelvelli and Ramnad districts, while the Sakkilyars are principally found in the west, in Coimbatore district. Although the censuses enumerate 76 untouchable castes in Tamil Nadu, these three big groups taken together with the uncertain Adi-Dravida category, make up 85 per cent of the untouchable population. The other castes are thus rather small in number.

About a third of the Harijans in Tamil Nadu own a little land, but most often this land is not very productive, not irrigated and of poor quality. Our village is situated, in any case, rather lower than the average. The level of education is also rather low, since only 22 per cent of the Harijans of Tamil Nadu are literate.

Most of the Harijans are Hindus. Christianity, of course, attracted the untouchables who were converted and who represent a not unimportant proportion of the Christian population. Unfortunately, we do not know their total number because they are not mentioned in the lists of the Scheduled castes, the Christians not having been recognized as untouchables by the government.

2) The Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam

As we have seen, the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam are divided into two communities: the Christian Paraiyars, who are the majority in the village, and the Hindu Paraiyars. Their common origin is beyond doubt. They are sister communities and the villagers insist a lot on this similarity. Despite the claims of some, the two communities are in no way hierarchized and excellent relationships join them together. The relations of friendship between men and women on both sides are innumerable and children play together without distinction; this last point is a good indication of the relationships between castes. This is not the case of Pallar children who are very rarely seen playing at Valghira Manickam, and this isolation is also symptomatic.

The Paraiyar caste is so big—it numbers more than two million individuals—that it is utterly impossible for it to constitute a homogeneous community. To my knowledge, there is no organization or institution which groups together the totality of the caste, or even important sections of it. Hence there is neither a caste chief nor a caste council or sub-caste council. The Paraiyars are, of course, divided into multiple sub-castes, although the term 'sub-caste' is perhaps inappropriate, as we shall see later on. In fact, the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam only have organic relationships with about a good twelve villages; beyond this, they no longer recognize the other Paraiyars. None the less, they also insist on the fact that no rule stops them from marrying a Paraiyar from Coimbatore or from Madras and that all Paraiyars are equal. The few cases of marriage outside the usual circle seem to confirm this equality among the different sections. In fact each marriage circle represents a community but the *endogamy* of this circle is a *relative* one, that is to say, it is not absolute and the circle is not closed. This is why one cannot speak of a veritable sub-caste as concerns the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam, since there is no strict rule defining the limits of the sections which are always blurred and not rigid. In addition, the sections are not really endogamous, at least not in an absolute fashion.

3) Caste Name and Self-representation

There is still a lot of work to be done on caste names in India; caste names are not without importance since they often designate the social status of a caste (see, on this subject, Ghurye 1969 and Sahay 1977). A caste which desires to rise socially will automatically adopt a caste name which reflects its ambitions and its claims. For example, among the Bhil tribes, several Sanskritized sub-tribes adopted pompous names of titles and chiefs like 'Tadvi', 'Patelia', 'Grasia', 'Damor', etc. Nearer to Valghira Manickam, it is said that Pallars who had become rich separated themselves from the rest of the caste in order to form an endogamous section which calls itself 'Karumaravar' or 'black Maravars'[4]. In the same way, the Shanars whose social status was on the border-line of untouchability in the nineteenth century, called themselves 'Nadars', that is 'lords of the land', during their social struggle. At each census-taking, hundreds of castes change their name in this way, hoping to gain in status.

[4]The Maravars are a princely high caste from Ramnad.

Even today, many Tamils speak scornfully of the Shanars, but never in front of them, of course. The Idaiyans have called themselves 'Kônars' or 'kings', and artisans have adopted the Brahmanic name of 'Vishwakarma'. All these castes are communities which are quite strongly Sanskritized and which, during the nineteenth century, carried on a struggle for improving their status.

Caste names are thus a privileged indicator of caste identity and self-representation. It is therefore interesting to see what the Paraiyars call themselves and the titles they claim for themselves. In India, untouchable caste names are, in general, very contemptuous. They sometimes constitute insults or are simply words meaning 'sweeper', 'scavenger', etc. (see Cohn 1969). They are therefore accompanied by strong pejorative connotations, and this is the case with the term 'Paraiyar'. In Tamil Nadu, calling someone a 'Paraiyar' implies contempt and will be taken as an insult. In consequence, although the caste name is recognized as such, the inhabitants of Valghira Manickam never present themselves, or at least very rarely do so, as 'Paraiyars'. For the outside world, they are 'Harijans'. The term 'Harijan', i.e. 'children' (*jan*) of 'God' (*Hari*), was invented by Gandhi to designate the untouchable population of India and mark the fact of their belonging to the world of the Divine. Instead of being Pariahs, the untouchables became the children of God. The term has more or less been accepted by the untouchables. Isaacs (1964: 34-46) has dealt admirably with this question. He notes that:

> Right now, ex-untouchables do not know what to call themselves for they are people trying to cease being what they were and to become something else, though they are not sure what.

Many untouchables thus vehemently refuse to be called by their caste name. In Tamil, as in the majority of Indian languages, the very term 'untouchable', *Tiindaamai*, has virtually disappeared, especially since the time that untouchability became illegal. It seems that the term 'Adi-Dravida', which means 'Dravidian aboriginals', was used in the past to designate the untouchables indiscriminately and that it is still common in certain areas, notably in Tanjore (see Béteille 1966). At Valghira Manickam, however, the term is utterly unused and even unknown, since the villagers do not know to what it refers. It is therefore an ancient term to designate the untouchables.

The term 'Harijan' has replaced 'Adi-Dravida', and if a stranger asks the caste of the village, the invariable reply is 'Harijan'. The

inhabitants of the village are a little in the situation described above by Isaacs. The Paraiyars have not yet carried out a struggle which could justify the adoption of glorious names like 'Konars' or 'Nadars'. At the same time, they no longer accept being called 'Paraiyars', and the term 'Harijan' which has a more neutral emotional content suits the situation better.

During the whole of my enquiry, I met only one or two persons who said they were Paraiyars, when they were asked about their caste. All the others replied 'Harijan', including the Pallars, which shows the general acceptance of the name in this part of India. The Paraiyars of Endavur also call themselves 'Harijans' and Moffatt goes so far as to call them the 'Harijan caste'—which is a mistake, in my opinion, since this term is used equally by the Sakkilyars and the Pallars between whom the differences are great. The term 'Harijan' thus designates status and not a caste. If the question was pushed further by asking, 'which caste among the Harijans', the automatic reply was 'Paraiyar', even if certain individuals did not want to reply to the question which they considered offensive. The adoption of the term 'Harijan' has in no way modified the internal make-up of the Paraiyar caste nor its relationships with other castes. It is interesting to note that the Paraiyars do not call the Pallars 'Harijans' but 'Pallars' and the latter do the same with the Sakkilyars. The term 'Harijan' is thus a manner of avoiding naming oneself with a term which is scorned.

But there is more to it than that. The 'caste people' also designate the untouchables by the term 'Harijan' whatever may be the caste. For the high castes, the fact that an individual is a Pallar or a Paraiyar does not represent a great deal. For them, he is above all an untouchable who is designated by a generic term, and that of 'Harijan' is usual today. It has become rather rude to call someone by his caste name, and people who still do so often have the reputation of being coarse or unmannerly. The Harijans themselves are very sensitive about this and it can provoke violent quarrels. In the past however, even when it was habitual to call an untouchable 'Paraiyar', there were also generic terms like 'Adi-Dravida'. But, what should be noted here is that the untouchables are often designated from the outside as forming a homogeneous community. This has no repercussions on their internal divisions. In a village, the inhabitants always know the caste to which the Harijans belong, but in towns or

when dealing with strangers, I was often surprised to observe that people knew that someone was a Harijan, but were incapable of saying what his caste was. In fact, a high-caste person's attitude varies little whether his interlocutor be a Paraiyar or a Pallar. For him, he is above all an untouchable.

Outside the region where he is known, an untouchable can easily hide his caste, all the more so since, nowadays, he can be as well-dressed as any other Indian. In fact, certain villagers told me that this had already happened to them. For example, the young men who work for restaurants in Madras claimed that they could never work in a restaurant if they admitted being Paraiyars; they had thus been hired under a false caste identity. An electrician also told me that he had passed himself off as a Kallar when he lived in another town. This is plausible, even if the Harijans have distinctive characteristics, as we shall see later on. It is possible that the above statements aim, above all, at proving that the Harijans are not different from the high castes. Unlike what is still claimed by certain people in India, there are certainly no clear physical differences between the untouchables and the rest of the population; cultural differences can be more or less easily removed from behaviour.

In brief, the term 'Harijan' is used today by the 'outside', as the villagers themselves say. It corresponds to a better image of the caste while the traditional caste name is considered humiliating. Reciprocally, the high castes also designate the untouchables by the term 'Harijan'. The adoption of this generic term which transcends caste differences between the untouchables has not however abolished these differences in concrete reality. The distinctions between Pallars and Paraiyars remain as keen as in the past, and the Paraiyars call the Pallars by this name and do not designate them by the term 'Harijans'. It is thus false to consider the term 'Harijan' as designating a caste.

This is simply a generic concept which resolves, so to speak, the dilemma of the untouchables about which Isaacs speaks: they no longer really know what to call themselves. The term 'Harijan' is relatively neutral and it does manage to make people forget the despised condition of the untouchables. At the same time, the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam, as we have already seen, have not yet undertaken a struggle for social advancement which could justify the adoption of prestigious names like the Konars or the Nadars. For

this, a much greater unity in the caste would be necessary, but also a certain strength in order to be able to impose such a name on the outside world. This is not easy, and even today, nearly a century after the adoption of the term 'Nadar', and the remarkable social progress of this caste, it is common to hear the high castes speak with scorn of the 'Shanars', even if this term has displayed a tendency to become less frequent. Among the Paraiyars, unity is almost non-existent, even though they feel themselves to be members of the same caste. This obviously leads us to discussion about the internal divisions among the Paraiyars, but before doing so, it is perhaps necessary to speak of their mythological origin.

There is however another element which is brought out by an analysis of the caste name: the absence of pride in being a Paraiyar. The caste represents shame which has to be hidden as much as is possible. There is no reason to be proud of one's origins and this shame certainly represents a problem of cultural identity for the Harijans. It is easy to understand why people who are ashamed of their origins have difficulty in being able to find unity and common action. A Harijan intellectual often tends to hide his caste (see Isaacs) and breaks away from his community. There is no pride, as in the West, of coming from a poor family when one has made a success of oneself. Being a Harijan is like being a member of a family which has the plague—the best thing is to leave it.

4) The Mythological Origins of the Paraiyars

Myths of origin are another form of self-representation. In India, it is a way for a caste to explain its position in the system, but also a way of justifying certain ambitions, at least when a caste does indeed have ambitions. In the latter case, the myth of origin represents, together with the caste name, a fundamental step in the search for a new caste status. The case is universal in India. A caste which desires to improve its status will adopt a new name, judged to be more prestigious, and will write a new history in mythological form which represents the caste as being born from a divine couple, or from some other prestigious figure. When the social ascent of the Nadars took place, tens of writers started to produce myths of origin of the caste. The same was true, in North India, of the Ahir cowherd caste who called themselves 'Yadavas' (from the *Yadu* dynasty to which the god Krishna belonged) and propagated myths are invented which told of their kinship with Krishna, who was himself a cowherd (Rao 1979:

124). The number of such examples, where myths are invented showing the social prestige of an inferior caste desirous of justifying its claims to status, could be added to indefinitely.

But myths of origin have another characteristic in India. For inferior castes, which are not engaged in this process of social movement, the myth of origin is a rationalization of the caste's inferior status. Here again the phenomenon is universal and it is found with remarkable constancy in the North as in the South of India. But there is more to it: this rationalization of the caste's status also always takes on the same forms—it is not presented as the fruit of divine will, or as a defect inherent to the members of the caste. Quite on the contrary, the lowness of the caste always appears as the result of a mistake, a joke, wickedness or deceit. The fact is truly remarkable and an infinite number of variants of this piece of bad luck are to be found. The pattern is always the same: at the outset, the caste was honourable, but through the artlessness of its members, or through the craftiness of others, its status gradually sank lower until it became what it is today. The myths often also express a kinship relation between the caste and a superior caste. Finally, other myths often tell how the high castes owe their high status to a piece of dishonesty, or some kind of craftiness. The myth of origin of the Paraiyars combines all these elements to some extent. At Endavur, the Paraiyars tell how the Reddyars acquired their status (Moffatt 1979: 67):

> In the nineteenth century, the village was dominated by the Idayars who were illiterate. The Reddyars then belonged to the Oddar caste, an almost untouchable caste, but they knew how to read and write and were hired as employees by the Idayars. The British then decided that anybody who paid land-tax for five consecutive years would become the legal owner of the land. The ignorant Idayars heard nothing about these measures; the Oddars paid the tax in their own name and thus dispossessed the Idayars from their land. This is how they became Reddyars.

It is highly improbable that the Reddyars changed caste in this way, but the story is interesting because it shows us that social status is something relative and which is sometimes acquired by not very respectable means. There is no moral judgement properly speaking in these stories, but they aim at showing that world order is an arbitrary and relative state of balance; those who are at the top only occupy this place because of luck or malice and certainly not because of their intrinsic qualities or divine will. In this respect, it seems to

me extraordinary to note that the myths of origin question the very idea of superior or inferior birth, whereas the whole of Indian society is based on these differences. In this way, they pave the way to social mobility which, despite the rigid framework of Indian society where the status of each and everybody is fixed by his birth, has probably always existed. In other words, as Kolenda emphasizes (1964: 75), the myths of origin of the inferior castes question the order of karma, according to which their present condition is supposed to be justified by their actions in a previous life. On the contrary, these myths state that the present position of the untouchables is the fruit of an injustice.

It thus becomes possible to link this idea with what we said in the last section concerning the fact that the untouchables are able to show modes of thought which are in opposition to caste order. Their position in the hierarchy is not accepted and can even be questioned.

At Valghira Manickam, I was able to collect a myth of origin which is found among almost all the Paraiyars of Tamil Nadu and which fits in perfectly with the principles stated above. One might almost say that it is a classic case, since it contains all the elements of which we have spoken. It is told both by Christian Paraiyars and Hindu Paraiyars. This is the simplest version:

> *Myth 1, version 1:*
> In the beginning, there were two brothers who were poor. They went together to seek out God and pray to him. God asked them to gather up the remains of a dead cow. The elder brother replied: *'Een thambi pappaan'* (My younger brother will do it), but God understood: *'Een thambi paappaan'* (My younger brother is a Brahman); from that day on, the younger brother became a Brahman (*paappaan*), while the elder brother became a Paraiyar. All the other castes originate from these two brothers.

This version contains the essential elements. One of its peculiarities is that God sanctions the difference between the two brothers. However, in my opinion, this is not a determining element, since other versions do not bring God into play, but a king or a father. In addition, God simply repeats what human beings have themselves said. God does not impose anything; it is the elder brother who, in the end, decides the place of each of the two. On the other hand the kinship of the two brothers is a fundamental element in the myth which makes the Brahmans relatives of the Paraiyars. The narrators always insist on the importance of this identity. In many cases, some

villagers do not remember the myth but, each time, they remember that there is a story which tells how the Paraiyars and the Brahmans were brothers. It should also be underlined that the Paraiyar is the elder brother and the Brahman the younger brother. In the Tamil family structure the difference has its importance. A younger brother owes obedience and respect to his elder brother, who is almost like a father for him. However, this does not mean that this element is really fundamental to the understanding of the myth. It could be linked to the fact that the Paraiyars were Adi-Dravidians, the original inhabitants of the Tamil country. The detail proves, in any case, that the Paraiyars are in no way inferior to the Brahmans since, at the beginning, they were even their elder brothers. In one version of the myth, the Paraiyar was the younger brother, but according to my information this example is unique. In general, it is the Paraiyar who is the elder brother and we shall see later on that this is perhaps a crucial element.

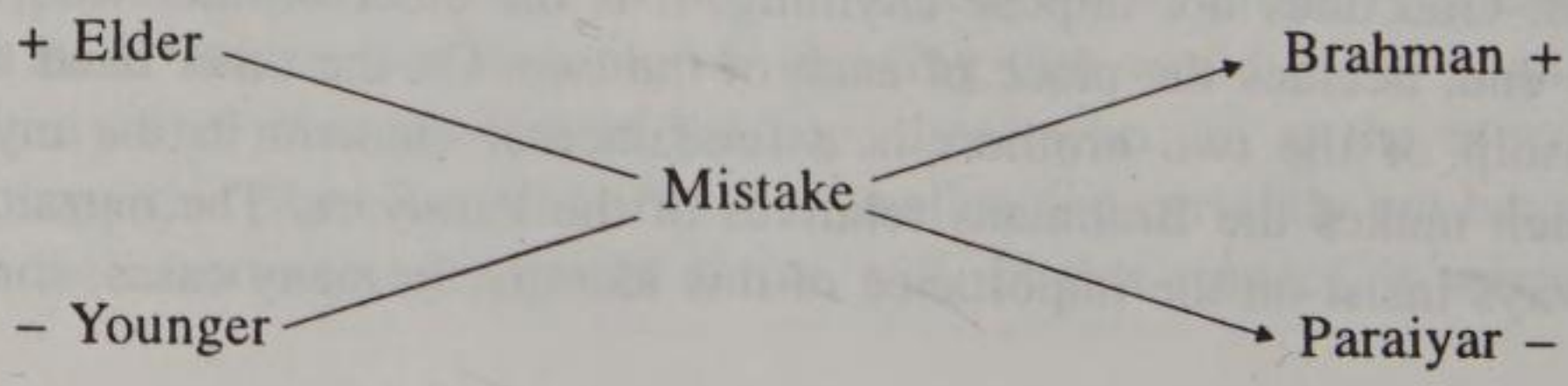
The second important element of the myth is the misunderstanding which is the root of the division into castes. It is a pun which provokes the Paraiyars' downfall. The incorrect understanding of the elder brother's wishes is also to be found in several versions of the myth and causes the Paraiyar's loss of status. This is obviously the very heart of the myth and is the element which casts doubt on the theory of karma, and the fact of merit being acquired simply by birth. The myth thus has the following structure:

Honourable status → mistake → downfall

The myth explains at the same time the reason for Brahman superiority, which is also the fruit of the (same) mistake. For the Brahmans, the following progression takes place:

Honourable status → mistake → promotion

The starting point could be considered in another way, if one takes into account the fact that the Paraiyar is the elder brother and the Brahman the younger brother. The myth then consists in an inversion of the original order:



What has clearly happened is an unfortunate reversal of reality since, generally speaking, it is the elder brother who should be invested with the superior status which his status leads us to expect. In this context, the fact that the Paraiyar is the elder brother plays an important role in the myth, although it is above all a way of showing his initial qualities. It should be noted that the Paraiyar's 'seniority' is found in other customs; a Paraiyar song says (see Moffatt 1979: 123):

I am the first-born
I first wore the sacred thread
I am a Sangu Paraiyar

Seniority with respect to the Brahman is manifested here by the fact of being the first to wear the sacred thread which is a Brahman privilege. A Paraiyar from Valghira Manickam used to interpret the following Brahman custom in the same way: at Brahman weddings, the family takes offerings called *varisai* (betel nuts, fruit, flowers, etc.) and carries them, to the sound of a drum, to a tree called *avarancheddi*. This offering is called *annanvarisai*, 'the offering to the elder brother', which shows that the Brahmans still remember their elder brother. Iyer (1981, I: 69) mentions that in Kerala, Paraiyars are called the 'elder Brahmans'. Finally, all the versions of the myth reported elsewhere insist on the same fact. Even different myths use this element. Such is the case of the myth reported by Moffatt (1979: 121):

Myth 2:
Originally, there was nothing in the world, except a woman called Adi (origin). She was alone and wanted a husband. She made a sacrificial fire (*yagam*), fasted and meditated. Finally a handsome man emerged from the fire and married her. He was none other than Ishwara (Shiva). The couple lived happily. After some time, four children were born.

The gods were satisfied with everything, except for the creation of the castes. So they planned it. The four children had to cook beef one day. The eldest son offered to do it. His three brothers sat around the fire. While the meat was cooking, a piece fell out of the pot. The eldest son saw it fall and thought that it would spoil his cooking, and so he hid it in the ashes. The other brothers saw this and accused him of stealing meat and insulted him. They shouted: '*Paraiyaa, maraiyaade*' ('Paraiyar, do not hide that'). Hence the name 'Paraiyar'. After this, the eldest brother was forced to live separately and was called 'Paraiyar'.

This version is somewhat different, but the reversal stays the same, since the elder brother suffers loss of rank. On the other hand, here there is no misunderstanding on the gods' behalf, but it is the artlessness and kindness of the elder brother which provoke his misfortune. The gods in fact asked the *four brothers* to cook the beef, and it is only because of the elder brother's willingness to help that the others were spared from having to do so and thus escaped downfall. It is not the gods who call him 'Paraiyar', but his younger brothers. It becomes apparent that the structure of the myth is the same. Some new elements make it a little more polished: here the eldest son is Shiva's first-born, which is not a trifling honour. Beef is also at the heart of the matter, though in a different way: it is no longer a question of removing the carcass of an ox, but of eating it, which is just as degrading. Each time, it is the gods who ask that the task be accomplished. In the second myth, the Paraiyar volunteers to do it while, in the first, he tries to get his brother to do the work. However, in both cases, the younger brothers could (or should) just as well have accomplished the task. That is to say, there is no predestination. The central mistake of the first myth gives way to the dutifulness, but also the artlessness, of the second.

This fact introduces another theme which is that of work. The myth explains the division of labour into intellectual work and manual work. After all, someone has to look after picking up carcasses and do all the chores. I collected a version of the myth which clearly brings out this difference:

> *Myth 1, version 2:*
> Two brothers went to a temple in order to conduct a prayer ceremony (*jabbam*). On the way, they came across the remains of a dead cow. The younger brother being weak and small, the elder brother said he would clear the road. The people standing by the road none the less asked him to go and conduct the prayer session himself, but he replied '*Een thambi pappaan*'. The people there understood that his brother was a Brahman (*paappaan*). To thank him for his work, God blessed him and made him a Paraiyar, whereas his younger brother became a Brahman.

This version is somewhat Sanskritized. God calls the elder brother 'Paraiyar' as though it were an honour. It does not really combine the two preceding versions, since although the scenario is rather similar to that of the first myth, the crux of the story uses a theme of the second myth, since the elder brother voluntarily offers to

accomplish a degrading task. God indeed thanks him for this which proves that such tasks have to be done. Here the Paraiyar does not attempt to perform his duty since, on the contrary, he even refuses to accomplish the priestly functions. The insistence of the onlookers proves, once again, that he could have accomplished this task, which seemed to be his beforehand, just as well as his brother. This was in fact his original intention, and this confirms again that the original aptitudes of the Brahmans and the Paraiyars were equivalent, and that the Paraiyars could just as well have become priests as scavengers.

In India, there is no real work ethic as in the West. The work of a blacksmith or a peasant is not glorified as it is in our school textbooks, and popular imagery portrays the rich man, the man who has succeeded, as not working, whereas the poor are precisely those who have to work hard and 'carry stones on their heads', as the villagers say. The Paraiyars are, despite everything, conscious of the services which they render to society by their work and when they tell the myth just mentioned, the villagers often insist on their mythical ancestor's courage, while the Brahmans were created in order to do nothing. The elder brother is the one who wants to work, or at least the one who is obliged to do so. The Paraiyar is thus the worker *par excellence.* People say,

> The Brahmans used to do nothing and did not want to work. The Paraiyars were therefore invited to do all the work which the Brahmans refused to do. They did agricultural work, domestic work, everything!

Certain Pallars from Pani Pulan Vayal corroborated this fact as well as the original identity between Paraiyars and Brahmans:

> In the beginning, there were only Brahmans. There were no servants to help the priests yet. Hence, a king decided to divide the Paraiyars from the Brahmans and two brothers were separated: one became a Brahman, the other a Paraiyar who had to serve the priest.

This more prosaic version confirms the idea that, at the outset, everybody was a Brahman, that is to say of a high social rank; in this case, it is a royal edict which provoked the reversal of the hierarchy. The fact is important since both Paraiyars and Pallars are vehemently opposed to the idea that God wished to create castes. Even if some of the myths mentioned above give reason to think that the caste system was the fruit of divine will, the Paraiyars flatly deny

this point of view, and we shall see later on how they explain the origin of the caste system. In several versions, it is a king who divides his subjects, or even a father in the following version, which was collected at Valghira Manickam.

Myth 1, version 3:
A man had five sons. He always used to ask the eldest son to do the work for him, to fetch water, etc. But each time the elder son refused saying, *'Een thambi pappaan.'* The father understood that the youngest brother was a Brahman and the eldest son became a Paraiyar.

This version leaves no doubt as to the human, and even worldly, origin of caste divisions and this is a theme which is found in several other versions. Even when God intervenes in the myth, it is never he who decides that the elder son is to be the Paraiyar. Rather, this division is the product of chance or trickery. In another version of the myth, collected by K. David among the Paraiyars of Sri Lanka (Moffatt 1979: 125), there is no intervention whatsoever.

Myth 1, version 4:
Two brothers were the *pujaris* (priests) of the temple of Mariyamman. The elder brother decided to fast and observe a vow of silence. He asked his younger brother to look after the temple. So he said to the people, *'Nan Parrayan, tampi parpar'*, that is to say, 'I shall be silent (*parrayan*), my younger brother will keep watch.' But the people understood, *'Nan paraiyan, tampi parpar'* ('I am the drum player (Parayan), my younger brother is the priest').

The difference between Brahmans and Paraiyars thus does not have a divine origin; one might even say that it is contractual since the people present are the only witnesses to the act effectuated by the elder brother. Here also the elder brother is the more virtuous of the two; it is he who desires to undertake the highly laudable acts of fasting and asceticism. The younger brother has, once again, a completely passive role. Finally, it should be noted that, at the beginning, both the brothers were priests.

It is truly astonishing to observe that this myth is not only to be found at Madras but has also travelled across the ocean and appears among the Paraiyars of Ceylon. Bearing this is mind, it is less surprising to find very similar versions of the same myth among the Chamars of North India, thousands of kilometres away from Tamil Nadu. This is the version which Cohn reports:

Myth 3:
A Brahman came across a cow stuck in the mud. He decided to help it extricate itself (it is very meritorious to help a cow) and started pulling it. But while he was pulling it, the cow died and so he was in contact with a dead cow. When his elder brother saw this he made him an outcaste and he became the first untouchable (quoted by Kolenda 1964: 113).

The only notable difference with the myths mentioned before concerns the victim's order of birth, since here he is the younger brother. Apart from this, the myth bears a striking resemblance with the one which is told in the village. It is hard to imagine an oral transmission of the myth to such distant regions, separated by several states and different languages. It seems preferable to think that this myth, in fact, expresses a mode of thought which is common to all the untouchables of India, a way of explaining their position in the caste system and of accounting for the latter's existence. The untouchables' myths rationalize the inferior status of their caste but they also contest the divine legality of the caste system. By establishing a relation of kinship between the caste concerned and a high caste (Brahmans or others), they affirm the equality of men and restore to some extent the lost prestige of the caste. The myths of origin are thus able to resolve the contradiction between the present position of the caste and its ambitions, as far as status is concerned. This however is not always the case: Lynch (1972: 105) has noted that many low castes have myths which tell how, because of trickery, lies or conquest, they fell victim to hard conditions with a drastic reduction in status. But he goes on to say that few of them have rebelled on the basis of the strategy and motivations implied by their myth. The myth of origin is not necessarily an arm for action.

The myths we have reported do not in fact aim at giving the reasons for social ascent. They are actually a record of failure. When a caste rises socially, the myths used are more grandiose, like those of the Nadars (Hardgrave 1970: 111) which relate that the Nadars are no less than the descendants of the Pandyan kings who were beaten by the Muslims. The aim here is above all to provide a genealogy and no means are spared. We have already seen that, in the same way, the Yadavas claim to descend directly from Krishna. The Paraiyars do not have these ambitions for social advancement and content themselves for the moment with showing that they are human.

At this point, it is important to make a remark about the place of the myths of origin in Paraiyar society. I have no wish to make the reader believe that the myths occupy an important place in this society, it is in fact quite the reverse. Many villagers do not know this myth nor any other. The Paraiyars work hard and have little to do with literature. The elders do not spend the evenings telling stories and the story of the caste is not of much concern to these practical people. The different versions which I was able to collect show, however, that the myths are known, but they do not take on considerable importance for the Paraiyars. Some only remember certain details like, most frequently, the kinship between the Brahman and the Paraiyar. Someone drew my attention to a well-known song *'Adilun parayan ille':* 'Long ago, there were no Paraiyars'. Finally, another story was also told to me:

Myth 4:
Two brothers went for a walk in the forest. The elder brother had black skin and the younger had white skin. They got lost and decided that each would go his own way. The elder brother came to a Paraiyar village where he was accepted as a Paraiyar because of his dark skin. The younger brother came to a Brahman village where he was accepted as a Brahman because of his light skin. This is how the Brahmans and the Paraiyars came to be distinguished.

In this story, one element distinguishes the two brothers: their different complexion. However, this does not stop them being brothers and, once again, it is the product of chance that one goes to a Paraiyar village and not the other. In fact, the narrator insisted on the fact that the only important element of the story was the brotherhood of the Paraiyar with the Brahman. It is not necessary to look for a historical origin to this claim. We have seen that the inferior castes always try to find a relation of kinship with a high caste. The Pallars affirm that they come from the same family as the Kallars. The point is, above all, to express the idea of the primordial equality of men which was corrupted by society alone.

This myth of origin reminds one of the legends which relate the origin of the caste system, and which refuse to accredit this system with a divine origin. We shall have the opportunity to discuss this later. We now know that, because of a mistake, the Brahmans were separated from the Paraiyars. It is now time to see how the caste was made up and divided afterwards.

5) Divisions Within the Caste

As we have already pointed out, the Paraiyars have the feeling of belonging to a community. To be sure, this feeling is rarely translated into action and the Paraiyars do not have relationships with villages which are over 20 kilometres away. None the less, this putative unity is not without importance and might be able to reinforce itself in the future. It is possible to observe some cases of families from the village who have sought girls to marry to their sons outside the traditional marriage 'circle'. There is hence a certain unity among the Paraiyars. It even transcends the religious communities, since both Christians and Hindus consider themselves as belonging to the same 'race'. We shall discuss the relationships between the two communities in the next section. For the moment, we shall limit ourselves to an examination of the internal divisions within each community.

Throughout Tamil Nadu, the Paraiyars are divided into numerous subgroups, which sometimes constitute endogamous sub-castes themselves. This is true of all the other castes and so the Paraiyars are not unique in this respect. Some of the important castes, like the Vellalars, are divided into tens of endogamous sub-castes, to such an extent that certain authors, such as Ghurye, felt that the sub-caste was the true basic unit of Indian society. Mayer (1960: 159–60) has analysed this problem in greater depth and has shown that caste is significant in inter-caste relations but that, for internal questions, it is the sub-caste which is the basic unit. Mayer notes that the other castes make no distinction between the sub-castes of a caste: for example, Brahmans call all the Vellalars by this name without paying attention to their sub-castes, despite the fact that the latter are endogamous. It thus appears that caste and sub-caste are both fundamental institutions according to the context.

The Paraiyars of Endavur do indeed seem to belong to a real sub-caste, the Sangu Paraiyars, who are endogamous, but Moffatt says little about this aspect of things. The divisions about which the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam speak seem to me to be less rigid and do not appear to be true sub-castes, as I shall now try and explain.

In the first place, many of the villagers do not know the division to which they are supposed to belong. They will say that they are Harijans and, if pressed, that they are Paraiyars, after which many of them know no more. They are simply Paraiyars. A certain number of Christians state, however, that they belong to a subgroup of *Nesavu*

Kara Paraiyars. The term *'Nesavu'* means 'weaving' and '*Kara*' means 'man'. The *Christian* inhabitants of Valghira Manickam thus claim to be weaver Paraiyars. 'Our ancestors were weavers', they say, 'this is why we have kept this name'. However, nobody in the village knows how to weave and no one owns a loom. The historical value of such a claim is thus doubtful, and its meaning will become clearer on closer examination. For the villagers, there are three categories of Paraiyars in the region: together with the Nesavu Kara Paraiyars, there are the Kanatu Paraiyars (from *kadu*, 'forest'), who purportedly look after the forests. Finally, there are the *ûr* Paraiyars (*ûr*, 'village'), who are also called Tootti Paraiyars (*tootti*, 'scavengers'). The last category comprises the Paraiyars who have remained attached to a high-caste village and execute menial tasks like scavenging. According to the villagers, there are no Christian Toottis, but they add, all the same, that intermarriage with the Toottis is impossible because they are considered inferior. On the other hand, there is no essential difference between the Nesavu Kara Paraiyars and the Kanatu Paraiyars and intermarriage takes place between the two groups. Indeed, there were several people in the village who were Kanatu by origin. However, the circle of villages with which the people of Valghira Manickam marry only comprises Nesavu Kara Paraiyars, and hence the majority of marriages take place within this group.

We have already mentioned that, despite this fact, a certain number of villagers have never heard of the Nesavu Kara Paraiyars. This group is certainly not a structured one and is not endogamous. In this respect, it strikes me as erroneous to speak of a sub-caste as far as this group is concerned. Mayer has correctly shown that a sub-caste has all the attributes of a caste. This is not the case here. The Kanatu and Nesavu Kara Paraiyar groups are simply names which have the purpose of distinguishing these groups from the functions associated with scavenging. No Paraiyar lays claim to the name 'Tootti'. It is a fictive category invented by the Paraiyars solely in order to differentiate themselves from it. The Hindu Paraiyars correctly explain this state of affairs by saying that they themselves were Toottis before, but that they no longer perform these tasks. The Christians sometimes take pleasure in whispering that the Hindus are Toottis, but, in fact, they are no more Toottis than the Christians are. In Christian villages, like Kilyur, there are Paraiyars who are still real

ûr Paraiyars, that is to say, who have to accomplish their traditional obligations and, in addition, at Valghira Manickam itself, the Christian Paraiyars are the only ones who work as municipal scavengers. The term 'Nesavu Kara Paraiyar' is thus a name which aims at giving a certain prestige to the caste which, in fact, has never had weaving as dominant occupation. When they became Christians, the Paraiyars intended to raise their status and distinguish themselves from the other Paraiyars. To claim to be a Tootti would be shameful, but the category survives in order to be able to distinguish oneself from it.

I have little data concerning the Kanatus. This group occupies villages pretty close to Valghira Manickam, like Oonjanai and Kunjan Kulam. I have no explanation to give for the origin of the name. It should be noted that there are marriages between the two groups which are neither regular nor numerous, but this is perhaps as much due to the fear of multiplying marriages which are contrary to the rule of cross-cousin marriage, as to any other specific rule. In point of fact, there are marriages between the two groups and the villagers insist that nothing prohibits them. The Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam claim to be able to marry Hindu Paraiyars from any region of Tamil Nadu, and recent attempts to do so seem to show that this is more than a simple statement. The Christian Paraiyars hence belong to a group which they call Nesavu Kara Paraiyars. The object is above all to make a distinction with the Toottis (an occupation rather than a caste name), since it is not possible to consider this group as forming a real sub-caste. There is no hierarchy between these two groups, which are known to the Paraiyars. All the Christians consider themselves as equal among the Paraiyars. By becoming Christians, they consider themselves to have stopped being Toottis.

The Hindu Paraiyars are less sensitive, but also clearer, as far as this question is concerned. They claim that there are no more Tootti or *ûr* Paraiyars: 'We used to be Toottis but, today, nobody does these tasks any more.' This statement, which is quite common, clearly shows that the name 'Tootti' does not refer to a sub-caste but to an occupation. The Hindus have no difficulty in showing that nobody in the village performs these tasks any longer. So, whereas the Christians define themselves with respect to the Hindus, which they were formerly, by claiming to be superior to the Toottis, the Hindus define themselves with respect to the Christians and claim to be Putchi Kara Paraiyars. The *putchu* is, for the Paraiyars, the distinguishing mark

of a sect which is painted on the forehead. Shaivites are distinguished by a mark made up of three parallel horizontal lines on the forehead. These marks are made with ashes. The Hindus admit to having adopted the name Putchi Kara Paraiyars recently, while their parents were still alive. Again according to them, it is to distinguish the Hindus from the Christians: the Christians make the sign of the cross on the forehead, while the Hindus use the *putchu* and this is why they are called, or rather why they call themselves, Putchi Kara Paraiyars, since it is very shameful to be called 'Tootti', and they therefore prefer this other name which distinguishes them from the Christians.

The Putchi Kara Paraiyars do not form a sub-caste either. The Hindus know of no other section among the Paraiyars and have no objection to marrying any other Paraiyar. It should also be noted that the Hindus unanimously accept the name Putchi Kara Paraiyar.

Basically, for the inhabitants of Valghira Manickam, there is only one kind of Paraiyar. The names they employ do not have a real sociological existence, apart from that of a line of demarcation with respect to 'degrading tasks which they were obliged to accomplish for the high castes'. While it is therefore true that there are no real sub-castes among the Paraiyars in the region, the importance of caste should however be noticed. For them Paraiyar is not just a hollow word, on the contrary, it implies an acute sense of identity. When among other people, the Paraiyars only really feel at ease with other Paraiyars. This is why the villagers oppose inter-caste marriages: there is no feeling of equality among the castes, and this difference would create too many problems. This explains why hypergamous marriages, which are sometimes considered prestigious in North India, are equally rejected here, in order not to create problems owing to the superiority of one party over the other. Paraiyar marriages are completely isogamous and no difference in status separates the two parties, as we shall see in the following chapter.

Although Dumont was correct, in certain cases, to underline the structural nature of caste which permeates all social relationships (see also Parry 1979: 3), this assertion does not apply to the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam, who do not have hierarchized sections but who, on the contrary, consider themselves all equal. None the less, caste is indeed the fundamental institution of the village and remains very active. It is caste which cements social relationships and which doubtless explains why a population, which is so divided by all kinds of

quarrels, still holds together. We shall see, for example, that the differences between Pallars and Paraiyars are still very acute. Some authors, such as Majumdar and Hutton (1973: 111), were right in asserting that caste furnishes a socially integrated and fixed milieu for its members. It provides them with security, with a framework of life and the milieu in which they find all their personal relationships. For example, the Paraiyars do not like the company of the Pallars, because the latter 'think themselves superior' and equality within the caste somewhat alleviates the inequalities from outside. This equality is fiercely defended and envy strikes anybody who wishes to rise socially, as we established in Chapter Two. It is, however, clear that one cannot claim that this internal equality is a characteristic of all the untouchables of India. On the contrary, many cases of inequality exist and the divisions found at Endavur, although not clearly marked, are there to prove it (see, for example, Dube 1955: 41; Harper 1968: 63, etc.). It cannot be denied that at Valghira Manickam there is a certain equality *within the caste itself* which, however, does not imply that the Paraiyars everywhere are characterized by an egalitarian ideology.

The feeling of hierarchy is not very deep-rooted among the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam. Apart from the fact that they have no subdivisions, there are few castes in the region below them. For example, the Paraiyars are not in direct contact with the Sakkilyars, whom they consider inferior. But as they have few relations with these Sakkilyars, it is difficult to put their inferiority to the test. In the area, the Paraiyars are thus at the lowest level of the social hierarchy and they do not greatly insist on a hierarchy which puts them at a disadvantage.

Caste provides the Paraiyar's framework of life. It is within the caste that he will find a wife, relatives and friends. The essential parts of his life (especially the non-economic ones) take place within the caste. All members of the caste are considered equal, even if people refer to the shadowy Toottis, who no longer exist and who are considered inferior. Subdivisions are not structured and have little reality. There is no institution which groups together the Nesavu Kara Paraiyars, a term which is not even known to everybody. The name is used to show, once again, that one is no longer a Tootti or impure. The result is that this analysis of the internal structure of the caste

confirms our point of view, according to which Moffatt's conclusions have to be moderated somewhat.

6) Relationships Between Hindus and Christians

The particular case of the relationships between the two Paraiyar communities perfectly illustrates the views we have just expressed. If the villagers are questioned about these relationships, there is a high chance that they will be described as 'excellent' and 'very friendly'. Daily observation was able to back up to a large degree this optimistic view.

In the first instance, the villagers, be they Hindus or Christians, do indeed feel their Paraiyar identity and admit that they belong to the same community. Some say, 'we have simply remained Hindus' or 'there is no difference between us, we are all Paraiyars'. In daily life, this identity is not a vain word. We have seen that one of the streets is mixed and that the fact of being neighbours does not create any problems between the two communities. Indeed I never heard of there being a disagreement between them. The only incident which I got to know of was the fact that the Hindus refused to allow a Christian woman to set up a shop on the location of their former cemetery. The matter went no further and the shop was built after all. Cases of friendship between Hindu and Christian Paraiyars are, on the other hand, numerous. The children of the two communities play together from infancy, and these comradely relationships continue during adolescence. Once, when a Hindu man spoke to me with great praise about his Christian brother-in-law, I thought that I had discovered an interesting case of mixed marriage, but seeing my astonishment, he explained that the man was not really his brother-in-law but simply a very good friend. The wife of a worker from Dubai spends the time of day at her best friend's, who is a Christian woman. When men play cards, Hindus and Christians show the same enthusiasm for the game. Among the young, Hindus and Christians go out together. Things can go even further since there is a case, known to all, of adultery between a Christian man and a Hindu woman. Such a thing would be unthinkable among the Pallars. Another indication of these good relationships is the manner in which the members of the two communities call each other, by kinship terms, *mâma, annan, atachi,* etc. This example is often quoted as a proof of good relationships. We shall see later that Christians regularly pray to the goddess Mariyamman while the Virgin Mary is popular

among the Hindus. A Hindu woman hence concludes, 'We have the same origin, the same caste, the same customs, everything is common to us, except religion.' I even encountered people who claimed that intermarriage was not prohibited, but as they were not able to give me concrete examples, we must content ourselves with saying that this statement simply bears witness to the excellent relationship between the two communities. The contrast with the Pallars, who inhabit the same conglomerate settlement, is striking in this respect. Pani Pulan Vayal is another world—although relationships between the two castes are not always bad, there are always tensions and a social distance, as we shall see in the following sections.

Despite this, it is important to make some remarks about the picture which we have just portrayed. While inter-community relationships are excellent, they do not go much beyond the individual level. The two communities, as we have seen, are not organically linked. The affairs of each community are treated separately and there is no assembly which brings them together. It is true that the institutionalization of each community is very weak, but it is essential that this point be mentioned. All the same, these good relationships are not maintained with any other caste, and even if individual relations of friendship exist between the Paraiyars and the Pallars, the two communities do not maintain a good relationship, and the fact that there are few contacts which tie them together bears witness to this state of affairs. We may thus say that the excellent relationships between the two Paraiyar communities are not very formally structured.

Secondly, there are certain snags in the relationships between Hindus and Christians. While no one denies that relationships are indeed good, there are, on the other hand, certain people who consider that the two communities do not have the same status. The preoccupation with status is not however an important one in the village, and does not play any role in reality. The Paraiyars agreed to classify the castes in the village in order to reply to my questions, and even perhaps in order to please me and give a good image of themselves. Traditionally speaking, the Pallars are considered higher up in the hierarchy than the Paraiyars. In the village, however, people pretend not to admit this superiority. People say that the Paraiyars are higher up than the Pallars, who are cheats and are dirty. The Christians often place themselves first, as do the Hindus: when I asked people to place the three

communities of the village by order of rank, I obtained all the possible combinations and, at the end of the day the question of superiority does not intervene much. In my opinion, it is only effective between Pallars and Paraiyars since, as we have said and as we shall soon see, the relationship between these two castes is somewhat strained. On the other hand, between the Hindu and Christian Paraiyars, there is no essential difference.

However, the question of commensality, which is an important indicator of relationships between castes, does not receive a unanimous reply. There are people who claim to refuse food or water to those of the other community. Once, when a Christian stated that this was the case, there was a general uproar: the others said that this was not true, that he was perhaps speaking for himself, but that most of the villagers made no difference between the two communities. In addition, it must be insisted that such assertions were rare, and I seriously suspect that those who made them did not follow them out in practice. As I have already pointed out, one has to be cautious about claims to status in India. Saying that one does not accept food from the others amounts to saying that one is respectable and, in this context, it is normal to want to give a certain image of oneself. Most of the Pallars thus claim not to accept water from the Paraiyars but, as said before, Pallars can be observed drinking a glass of water among the Paraiyars.

Among the Hindus, I met two people who claimed to be clearly superior to the Christians because of the fact that the latter did not respect the rules of pollution. Here again, these are exceptions. The Hindus themselves do not respect these rules. One of them told me that the goddesses Mariyamman and Kali would be angry if they were to eat food at a Christian's, but I know that members of his family used to eat with Christians; I was not able to observe if he himself respected his principles or not. Again, these are isolated cases, as the man in question himself admitted. He himself kept up good relationships with the Christians.

In brief, despite these few details, one may conclude that the Hindu and Christian Paraiyars consider themselves to be on equal footing. More, they also maintain cordial relationships of neighbourliness and friendship. These relationships do not result in common institutions, but then neither community is much given to action and

internal solidarity. Being a Paraiyar thus does indeed mean something, despite religious differences.

Before concluding this analysis of the internal make-up of the caste, it must again be underlined that the exclusion of the Christians from the official category of Scheduled caste has consequences for the community. The Christians are excluded from those untouchable organizations which agitate for the implementation of the guaranteed rights of the Scheduled castes. Their caste consciousness is less deep, as we shall see in the next chapter. The Christians are untouchables in social life, but they are not officially recognized as such. It thus becomes apparent that despite the relationship of equality which exists between Hindus and Christians, differences survive between the two communities.

7) Conclusions

Generally speaking, we may conclude from this analysis of the caste that there is indeed a certain equality of individuals within it. This equality even extends to the two religious communities which make up the village. Cultural identity is quite weak. The shame of being an untouchable still survives and neutral terminology is used to designate oneself. In the same way, the myth of origin gives an account of the misfortune which struck the Harijans at the beginning of the system. Their place in this system is the result of bad luck and not because of their intrinsic defects, or their karma.

Caste still has an important place in the life of the village, even if this importance is not always visible. Although the Paraiyars contest their place in the system and their so-called impurity, they do not question caste as an institution. Indeed, how could they, since they have never known any other system? The essential elements of social relationships, from marriage to comradeship, take place within the caste. Relationships with the other castes tend to be limited to economic ones. At any rate, it is not false to say that the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam find within the caste an equality and a certain comfort which they lack outside it. It is not possible to extend this conclusion to all the untouchables; it somewhat contradicts Dumont's views, according to which what happens inside the caste is the same as what happens *outside* the caste (1975b: 8). According to this point of view, which seems to be operative in certain cases, the structural character of the caste system reproduces inside the caste the hierarchy which exists outside. It becomes clearly apparent, from what has been

written here, that the Paraiyars are not divided into hierarchized sections. In addition, their marriages are isogamous and even the man/woman relationships tend towards a greater equality than in many other castes.

Once again, we see that one of the essential characteristics of the caste system has been poorly assimilated by the Paraiyars, and this confirms what we said in the first section of this chapter. We must now look at what happens outside the caste, that is to say, the relationships between the Paraiyars and the other castes.

C) Relationships Between the Paraiyars and the Other Castes

Till now we have dealt with the Paraiyars without taking into account their relationships with other castes. Today such a thing is possible since, although caste is still very active, the caste system has suffered serious attacks. The very existence of the village of Valghira Manickam as a relatively independent unit bears witness to this. As we shall see, the relationship between the Paraiyars and the other castes is much more limited than in the past.

Being at the bottom rung of the social ladder, the Paraiyars are considered as being impure by the other castes. They are therefore untouchables, and untouchability constitutes the characteristic form of relationship between the Paraiyars and the other castes. It will be useful to attempt to describe the state of affairs in the past, as we said in the last chapter. This will allow us to see more easily the changes which have taken place during this century.

1) Untouchability in the Past

On the basis of the elements at our disposal today, it is possible to obtain an idea of the relationships between the untouchables and the high castes in the past. Many still remember the discrimination to which they were subject until not very long ago.

In the last chapter, we examined the traditional tasks of the Paraiyars and their economic position in the 'classic' caste system. We know that the untouchables were in a state of 'semi-slavery'. They did not have the right to leave the village to which they were attached and for which they had to carry out a whole series of tasks, both economic and ritual, which were linked to waste, excrement and evil spirits. The relationship was, above all, one of dependence. The

untouchables owned nothing, and land was in the hands of the dominant caste. In order to subsist, the untouchables were obliged to accomplish the tasks expected of them. They worked for miserably low wages. They had nowhere to go and therefore had to accept their condition. The social fragmentation in which they lived did nothing to foster a 'peasants' revolt', and thus revolts were infrequent.

This economic dependence went together, among other things, with a whole list of social discriminations which we shall examine in this section. The impurity of their tasks conferred on the untouchables a permanent physical impurity. Contact with them thus polluted the high castes, who had to avoid touching them, but also avoid going near them, or even sometimes seeing them: some castes were thus 'unseeables', so to speak. In some areas of India, their very shadow was polluting: for example, the Mahars were not allowed to go inside the city limits of Poona except between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., that is to say during the hours when their shadow was not too long (Patwardhan 1973: 34). In Kerala, the distances to be kept between castes were fixed by rule: for example, a Mukkuvar had to remain 24 feet away from a Nambudiri Brahman, an Irava 32 feet, a Pulaya 64 feet and a Nayadi 72 feet (Rao 1979: 21). Not all regions adopted such sophisticated segregations, but in general the untouchables were kept away from high-caste streets, and had to live outside the villages, in quarters which are called *'cêri'* in Tamil. They could only go into certain areas of the village and then only for specific reasons; only the backs of the houses, where waste was gathered, were accessible to them (Reiniche 1981: 27). They were not allowed access to the village temples and could not draw water from the well.

On the other hand, the members of the high castes never went into the *cêri* and even less into one of the houses there. They had to purify themselves with a ritual bath if, by misfortune, they came into contact with an untouchable. Since cooked food and water are transmitters of pollution, the high castes never accepted food prepared by an untouchable, nor water. The untouchables were also excluded from worship in the village, with the exception of a few tasks related to the exorcism of evil spirits, for example, at the village festival or at funerals. Discrimination was, however, far from simply stopping there.

We have seen that the untouchables could not dress like others: they could not cover their head, or chest, nor the legs below the

knees. Gold and silver were also prohibited to them, as well as shoes and parasols. They constantly had to maintain a respectful attitude in the presence of the high castes, an attitude which verged on humiliation. They had to speak to a superior with eyes lowered and holding their hand to the mouth. They had to cross their arms over their chest—also a sign of humility—and could not raise their voice. In their language, they used terms which were specific to them: a Malayali untouchable, when speaking of his children, had to call them his 'calves'; the untouchables had to refer to a high-caste man, and even his children, in terms meaning 'lord' while, on the contrary, even the children of the high castes called the untouchables humiliating names.

An untouchable could not sit down in the presence of a member of a high caste, or could sit only in an inferior position. When an untouchable encountered a high-caste man in the street, he had to go down into the ditch, in order to leave the street clear. He had to carry out all the tasks which he was ordered to do and allow himself to be beaten if a high-caste man had decided so. We may thus see how deep was the discrimination to which the untouchables were victim. Their aim was not only to protect the high castes from pollution, with which the untouchables were permanently imbued, but also to maintain the established social order by keeping the untouchables in a state of subjection.

The list of these discriminations is far from having been exhausted, but we now have an idea of the harsh life which the untouchables led. The ancestors of the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam witnessed most of these discriminations until only some decades ago. Indeed, they have not all disappeared—far from it—as we shall see in the following sections. The punishments meted out for any attempt at revolt must have been terrible. We have little information on this subject, but the impressive number of murders and attacks against the Harijans which still take place lead us to believe that things were even worse in the past. We shall have the opportunity to come back to this question.

The Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam and their ancestors were subjected to most of the discriminations detailed above. In the region, the dominant caste is that of the Kallars. This caste has a warlike demeanour and its members stopped at nothing when it came to getting respect out of people. The Christians were often subject to the

Udayars, another important caste. Until recently, the Paraiyars could not go to school. Neither could they bathe in the municipal *oorani* (pond). Everything they wished to undertake had to be sanctioned by the high castes on whom they depended. They were not paid for the various tasks which they carried out, but simply received a few measures of grain at the harvest. I was told, for example, that when an illiterate untouchable received a letter, or some official document, he had to go and see a Kallar in order to learn the contents of the letter, but the Kallar made the untouchable work for a whole day on his land before agreeing to read the document. Another man remembered some Brahman families who lived on the other side of the village. Whenever they visited Kanda Devi, they had to pass alongside Valghira Manickam and, in order to avoid seeing the untouchables, they covered their heads with a towel.

The Paraiyars also did not use to be allowed into the tea shops. They had to remain outside and drink their tea in coconut shells and, later on, in glasses different from those used by the high castes. They could not, of course, go to the temple or even into the village. Finally, they had to maintain an attitude of humility in a Kallar's presence. The Kallars used the Harijans as they wished. When they needed manpower, they sent a message to the *cêri* and the Harijans had to come immediately, on pain of being beaten.

2) Untouchability Today

2.1) Change and permanence: All the elements described above were characteristic of the past. But what is the situation today? What happens in a village (*ûr*) like Valghira Manickam which is not a real *cêri* and which has a certain independence? This is what we shall discuss now.

Untouchability has become illegal in India. This is important since it means, among other things, that an untouchable can take a bus or a train, vote for the candidate of his choice, leave his village, buy land, study at school or university, become a doctor, etc. Even if one remains at a purely legal level, the progress is enormous. Indeed, the untouchables have distinctly improved their lot during the last few decades. But untouchability is far from having been stamped out. Even today, it takes on subtle, but active, forms and still affects the inhabitants of Valghira Manickam.

As a generalization, one could say that untouchability is definitely receding outside traditional milieux. When an untouchable leaves his *cêri* and goes to a town, he becomes anonymous and can eat where he likes, pray in the big temples, sit where he wishes in the bus, etc. On the other hand, in the traditional milieux, that is to say in village society, untouchability is still very acute.

At Valghira Manickam, untouchability is none the less receding, given the village situation. Dependence with respect to the high castes has been seriously weakened and has even disappeared in certain cases. But many discriminations still persist. In this context, it is the Kallars who occupy the most important place in the village life and this is why it is the relationship with this caste which we shall now examine.

2.2) The dominance of the Kallars of Kanda Devi: It is not our intention to provide a monograph study of the Kallars of Kanda Devi. To learn more about the Kallars, reference may be made to the study devoted to them by Dumont (1957). We shall content ourselves here by recalling that the Kallars are traditionally a caste of thieves. In Tamil, *kallan* means 'thief', and the Kallars acquired a dreadful reputation for cattle theft, burglary and highway robbery. The British authorities listed them among the Criminal Castes. Today, the Kallars have become more pacific and constitute a farmer caste. None the less, they have kept their sense of honour, touchiness and the demeanour of warlike 'races'. Should a quarrel break out between a Kallar and another man, it is not unusual to hear the Kallar say, 'Be careful! I am a Kallar'. As we shall see, the need to be careful is often justified. The Kallars still get into fights easily and are feared by all.

The status of the caste is quite high. In the region of Devakottai, it even constitutes what Srinivas calls the 'dominant caste', that is to say the caste which controls the major part of the resources. The Kallars are grouped together by chieftainships, which comprise about twenty villages, called *nâdu* (country). Kanda Devi belongs to the Oonjanai *nâdu*. This *nâdu* is allied to three other *nâdus*: those of Iravuseri, Tendali and Anjikottai. At the religious festival of Swarnamurti Iswaran at Kanda Devi, the chiefs of the four *nâdus* meet in great pomp: each coming from his village accompanied by bands and fireworks. The four processions then join up to pull the god's cart round the temple. Tradition has it that the four chiefs are the

descendants of four brothers, who divided up their father's territory and this explains the confederation.

What is important for us, and is a remarkable fact, is that the Kallars are considered to be the real owners of the land. The territory of the *ṇâdus* belongs to them and, in the final analysis, it is thanks to them that the lower castes can occupy their present territory. One can already surmise the consequences of this rule: the Kallars enforce a 'customary law' over the land in the region, even if this law is not officially legal. As we shall have the opportunity of seeing, they make no bones about making the most of this 'law'. There are Harijans at Kanda Devi, and Valghira Manickam is not the *cêri* of Kanda Devi and probably never was. However, the proximity of the two villages and the Kallars' rights to land have brought with them a relationship of dependence.

If the inhabitants of Valghira Manickam can live in the village, it is thanks to the goodwill of the Kallars. First of all, as concerns land for building, the Kallars have regularly sold plots to the Paraiyars. The latter were swindled each time, since they realized that the plots did not legally belong to the Kallars, and they could thus not obtain the *patta,* the title-deed to the land. Their land was *nattam parambukku,* that is to say public dwelling-ground. Many such transactions were made between the Kallars and the Paraiyars. The Kallars claimed that the village belonged to them and hence they had the right to sell the land. Among the Pallars, there was a quarrel between two men who had both bought a plot of land from the same Kallar. The Kallars claimed, among other things—and still claim—that they own all the land in the vicinity of the village. Thus the *kanmaïs* and *ooranis,* the agricultural land, pastures, paths, etc. are all, according to them, Kallar land. The inhabitants of the reservoir to the east of the village do not dare oppose the Kallars, for fear of being driven from their homes. The cemeteries of the village, in the same *kanmaï,* were given free by the Kallars and the villagers cannot undertake anything without seeking the agreement of the Kallars. In 1981, for example, they wanted to dig an *oorani,* but did not dare since, so they said, the Kallars would never allow part of the rain water to be diverted towards Valghira Manickam. The Paraiyars cannot wash in the Kallars' *ooranis* as they wish. Until recently, they could use part of them, but stopped because of a quarrel. I never managed to find out what had happened exactly. Beforehand, the villagers had the

right to use one side of the *oorani* of Tanichavoorani, but a quarrel broke out among the young people and some young Kallars, so that, since then, the inhabitants of Valghira Manickam, except for a few women, dare not go and wash there. In brief, one may clearly see why the villagers call the region the country of the Kallars.

The importance of the Kallars is reinforced by the fact that they also control the Panchayats, that is to say the municipal assemblies. It is always a Kallar from Kanda Devi who is elected president of the Panchayat. The president chooses the members of his council from each village. Valghira Manickam has two representatives, a Christian and a Hindu. These old men have the reputation of accepting everything that the Kallars decide which, after all, does not make them any different from the other villagers. It is also said that they are never present at meetings but simply have to go to see the President to sign their time sheet. These last few years, the local assemblies had been dissolved, and were no longer functioning during my stay. The Kallars also control official posts like that of headman. When the Hindus want to obtain the advantages reserved for the Scheduled castes, they yet again have to appeal to the Kallars. Government ration shops are also situated at Kanda Devi. The Paraiyars claim that the Kallars corner the best supplies and sell only rice of poor quality to the Paraiyars. It thus becomes evident that the Kallars have retained a certain importance for the Paraiyars.

Finally, agricultural land is also the property of the Kallars. Most of the land around the village is in their hands. At least this is what they claim, since I am not sure that they possess the legal documents (*patta*) granting them the ownership of this land. Nobody contests their rights. The land is of bad quality and in general, they do not cultivate it, but rent it to the Paraiyars, as we saw in the last chapter. Rented land concerns only a relatively limited number of Paraiyars [22 families; see Chapter Three, Table 4], but the tenants can change from one year to another and more people can thus hope to be able to have some land. The villagers obtain few crops from their land but, in such a terribly poor economy, the smallest income is of importance. In addition, the prestige of cultivating land for oneself does hold a certain attraction for the Paraiyars. In conclusion, the Kallars have at their disposal an additional weapon for establishing their dominance.

The Kallars thus control a large part of the resources and power. They are also prominently placed in the administrative authorities, in politics and even in the police. They have connections everywhere, so that if a Paraiyar wants to obtain a recommendation for a study grant, a job or whatever, it is again to the Kallars that he has to address himself. In addition, the Kallars are materially better off and it is possible to borrow money from them. To be sure, they do this only as a last resort but, once again, their dependence is reinforced. This comes out clearly from the misadventure which befell Suvakin.

> Suvakin's little boy fell ill. It became necessary to find 100 rupees in order to go and see the doctor. A Kallar lent money to Suvakin at the usual rate of 10 per cent per month. After a month, Suvakin came across the Kallar in a tea shop at Devakottai. The Kallar threatened Suvakin and stopped him from leaving the tea shop: he wanted his money (110 rupees) on the spot. Suvakin insisted in vain that he had no money on him, but the Kallar would hear nothing of it. Finally, after several hours, he let Suvakin go with the promise that he would soon pay back the money. Suvakin then met a Chettiar for whom he had worked with his cart. The Chettiar immediately lent him 70 rupees which Suvakin took straight away to the Kallar. The next day, he took one of his wife's pieces of jewellery and pawned it for 90 rupees at Devakottai. He paid back the 70 rupees to the Chettiar and gave another 20 to the Kallar. He still was short by 20 rupees. Suvakin accepted to work for the Kallar for a wage of four rupees (instead of the usual eight or ten rupees). Suvakin thus went to work for three days at the Kallar's. On the fourth day, he found work at ten rupees a day and did not go to the Kallar's. The latter met Suvakin's wife who was cutting wood in the *kanmaï*. He manhandled her and confiscated her axe. Suvakin was obliged to go to see the Kallar that evening in order to excuse himself and ask the Kallar to be so good as to return his axe. He had to adopt a humiliating attitude, ask forgiveness and promise that his wife would come and finish the agricultural work for nothing.

The mechanisms by which dependence on the Kallars is maintained appear clearly here. We have now gone over all the institutions which contribute to maintaining dependence. This rapid overview might give the impression that dependence is complete. This is not at all the case and, as we have seen, the Paraiyars are freeing themselves little by little of the Kallars' yoke—even if they almost never dare to make open opposition. The reason, as we shall see, is that repression by the Kallars should not be underestimated, and can be serious, so that the Paraiyars always have a marked fear of the Kallars.

This fear is a determinant factor in the relationships between the two castes since, without it and the physical superiority of the Kallars, the domination of the latter would be, in my opinion, seriously undermined.

All the elements which we have just given explain why the Kallars still consider that they have certain rights over the population of the village, and that they have at their disposal the means of enforcing these rights. This is why, until recently, they used to send messengers to the village when they needed manpower. If a Paraiyar refused to come, he was mercilessly beaten and the Paraiyars still remember such punishments. The Kallars no longer use such brutal means, but they still employ the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam for lower salaries, that is to say, 3.50 rupees for women. Men, in general, do not go and work in Kanda Devi, but they still sometimes work for nothing for a Kallar. Such was the case of Cinniah, an old man who rented a little land from a Kallar, and who worked for this Kallar for nothing. He left, for example, for five days in order to fetch fodder without being paid. It is therefore principally those men who are dependent, in some way or other, on a Kallar, who are obliged to provide such services. The others still sometimes submit to this, but some dare to resist:

> Stanislas is a modern young man. His family is always clean and in good health, even though he earns a living by brick-making and is not well off. One morning, at dawn, a Kallar let him know that he wanted Stanislas to come and work for him, but Stanislas refused since he had been hired elsewhere. The Kallar then told him that he would cut off his hands and legs if he did not come, but Stanislas persisted and did not go. Since then, he avoids going to Kanda Devi and does not even go to the ration shop, in order to avoid the Kallars.

Such resistance is, however, rare. Stanislas refuses any contact with the Kallars of Kanda Devi and prefers living an independent life. He is none the less representative of a new tendency among young people, who refuse to give in and scorn the Kallars. To be sure, many do not express it so openly, but it is likely that the phenomenon will grow with the new generation, which is no longer used to giving in to the high castes.

The majority, however, continue to accept Kallar domination. I never heard of any case of open resistance or clear opposition to the Kallars (even Stanislas refused because he had work elsewhere). On

the contrary, the Paraiyars are afraid of the Kallars and prefer to keep silent in order to remain in peace. In certain villages, it is even customary still to ask the Kallars to settle disagreements between Paraiyars: it is the Kallars who then decide the punishment or fine. The judgement is accepted by both parties who would never have achieved an agreement without the intervention of a superior. At Valghira Manickam, this practice persists, but it has become rare. What happens more frequently is that people go and complain to a Kallar if there is a problem in the village. But, as one villager notes, the other party simply has to go and see another Kallar, who is an enemy of the first Kallar and the problem will not be solved at all. I encountered such an intervention, for example, in the case of a disagreement concerning an inheritance:

> The first wife of a man who had just died demanded the man's inheritance at the expense of the second wife, who had the support of the majority of the villagers. In order to enforce her claim, the first woman sought out a Kallar who, according to gossip, had been her lover. The Kallar contented himself with threatening the defender of the second wife with death, but the matter stopped there.

Another woman had recourse to a Kallar in order to put pressure on her husband, who had left her, but without success. It thus appears that the Paraiyars still address themselves to the Kallars in case of problems even though this happens less frequently than in the past. The dominance of the Kallars also manifests itself in behaviour, and in a whole list of discriminations which we shall now detail.

2.3) Discrimination and inferiority: While the dependence of the Paraiyars on the Kallars has not yet disappeared, the discriminations to which the untouchables are victim in the rest of India are not extinct either at Valghira Manickam. In the first place, physical segregation persists as much as possible. Kallars go only very rarely into the village. They have messengers, who are themselves untouchables, to do their errands. They never go into the house, or even the enclosure, of a Paraiyar. Nor is there any question of a Kallar's accepting water or food from a Paraiyar. In the same fashion, the Paraiyars do not have the right to go to Kanda Devi unless it is to perform a specific task. They would be immediately driven out. Kanda Devi is thus more or less closed to our villagers.

The question of the big temple at Kanda Devi is more difficult. Several Hindu Paraiyars claimed to me that they had the right to go to the temple of Kanda Devi and that, in addition, they had effectively already gone there. I have good reasons to have serious doubts about this. The more aware Hindus told me that they did not have the right to go into the big temple of Swarna Murthi Iswaran. I had little means at my disposal of verifying the assertions of either group. At the temple festival of Kanda Devi, many Paraiyars declared to me that they were going to the festivities. Thanappan and myself therefore went there, but did not meet a single villager in front of the temple, apart from Ramanathan, one of the two Hindus who worked at Dubai. On the way back, we met the villagers who had congregated at the north-west angle of the path of the processions, that is to say, the point closest to Valghira Manickam. Quite clearly, they did not dare to go into Kanda Devi. I admit that I am still surprised by the stubbornness of some who claimed to me that they had really gone to pray *inside* the temple. Although I am virtually certain of the contrary, and that other witnesses support my conviction, I had to mention the fact. Be that as it may, it remains true that the Paraiyars would never dare to go regularly to the temple at Kanda Devi; some of them have perhaps once made the most of exceptional circumstances (dense crowds, etc.) to go there, but I doubt that this is a frequent occurrence since they would be recognized too soon to stay there long. If they do not have the right to go into Kanda Devi, it is clear that access to the temple is also prohibited for them.

In a Kallar's presence, a Harijan has to adopt all the traditional signs of obsequiousness. When Suvakin went to get his axe back, he was obliged to plead with the Kallar and ask forgiveness. In the same way, in general, the Paraiyars have to remain humble and unobtrusive in a Kallar's presence. If they meet an inhabitant of Kanda Devi on their path, they move slightly to one side. A Paraiyar greets a Kallar by saying, *'Vanakam'* (good day) but the Kallar replies with a scornful term, *'Wada'*. The expressions *Wada* and *Poda* ('Go!' and 'Come!') are used by the Kallars when addressing the Harijans. The expressions are extremely humiliating and are taken as such. No one would dare to use them when addressing a person of equal status. It is still 'normal' for a Kallar to beat an untouchable and, even if the untouchable is physically stronger, he will not react since this would cause serious problems for him. For the slightest reason, the Kallars

meet together to avenge one of their kind, while the Paraiyars would never dare to group together to confront the Kallars. It often happens that a Kallar will strike a Paraiyar, but the reverse is uncommon. A Kallar does not speak to an untouchable but issues his orders from afar.

The Kallars, say the villagers, cannot abide the Paraiyars being well-dressed nowadays and some having become independent. They would like the untouchables to remain illiterate servants in rags. On this point, it should be noted that no child goes to school in Kanda Devi: the discrimination would be too great. At St Joseph's School, attended by the children from the village, there is not much discrimination—according to the villagers—but a teacher would hesitate to punish a Kallar child who had struck an untouchable. Young people say that discrimination increases with age and that at the college, for example, it is more acute. It is always a Kallar who is elected head of the students' association.

Here then are briefly the main discriminations to which the Harijans of Valghira Manickam are subject. It should be underlined that they are less serious than in the past: the principal difference lies in the fact that the *cêri* Harijans virtually had contacts only with the caste which dominated them. At Valghira Manickam, on the contrary, it matters little that one cannot drink tea at Kanda Devi. People give this village a wide berth when going to Devakottai. People work less and less for the Kallars of Kanda Devi and some have more or less freed themselves completely from them.

2.4) Fear, violence and reactions: We have just seen that the Kallars have at their disposal means of pressure in order to exert a certain constraint on the Paraiyars. Should the Paraiyars not accept docilely, they would have the means to make them regret their temerity: by not renting their land to the Paraiyars, by troubling them with administrative vexations, by claiming back land which they assert ownership over, by getting houses and brickyards removed from the *kanmaï*, by not lending money, by forbidding the use of the village paths to the villagers, etc. To be sure, if the Harijans were to unite, they would have legal means of fighting back, but such unity is virtually unthinkable. What stops the Harijans is not only their lack of unity and solidarity, but also the fear of the high castes whose repression can be terrible. The facts bear them out on this point.

The Harijans are afraid. They will never fight back in case of problems with the high castes. They are always uneasy in their presence since they know the sense of honour and pride which characterizes the Kallars. It is difficult to imagine the reprisals which would follow an act by the Harijans against the Kallars. As one of the villagers puts it, 'We do not want to see our houses burnt down, so we keep quiet.' In the past also, the slightest lapse of conduct was violently repressed by the Kallars, and we have seen that the Kallars still regularly threaten the villagers. There has never been a serious conflict between Kanda Devi and Valghira Manickam and the Harijans prefer a few humiliations to blind violence. They never go against Kallar interests since they know that they would never be forgiven.

In this context, it is useful to recall the incidents which took place in the village of Oonjanai, which is 5 kilometres away from Valghira Manickam. In June, a religious festival is celebrated in Oonjanai. In 1979, a conflict broke out between Kallars and Pallars. The latter intended to take part actively in the festival from which they were excluded. The Pallars wanted to have the right to take the temple horse in the procession. The quarrel took on serious proportions, and politicians and the District Collector had to act as mediators. Finally an agreement was made: the Kallars would be able to take the horse and hold their procession on 4 and 5 June, and the Pallars would do it on 1 July. The Kallar festival took place without incident, under the protection of a large police force. The Kallars then contested the compromise, but the District Collector upheld the permission which had been guaranteed to the Pallars. On 27 June at 8:30 a.m., a mob of over a thousand Kallars descended on the Pallar quarter, which they savagely attacked. Five Pallars were killed, about thirty wounded, fifteen houses were set on fire, jewellery and cattle were stolen and the stocks of cereal were burnt. The incident caused an uproar in the region and Harijan organizations rallied round. However, the culprits remained unpunished and the victims were not paid damages.

It is easy to imagine the impact of such an event on the Harijans of the area, all the more so since such acts of violence are not isolated. Two types of reaction follow such events: for the less 'aware', the fear of the high castes only gets worse. The 'lesson' has proved itself to have been fruitful. This reaction seems to be reasonably typical

of the Christian Paraiyars, who claim not to be at all concerned by the Oonjanai incident. Many refuse to take a stance and do not support the movement of solidarity which developed after the incidents. They want to avoid, so they say, getting into conflict with the Kallars of Kanda Devi and abstain from any commitment. In addition, it was Pallars who were the victims at Oonjanai and the Pallars only concern themselves with the Paraiyars when they need them, otherwise they simply scorn them.

The second reaction is a bitter feeling of revolt against the high castes and the desire to assert Harijan rights at last. This reaction is certainly found among the Pallars of Pani Pulan Vayal, who are more militant, and, to a lesser extent, among the Hindu Paraiyars. We shall have the opportunity to come back to this question in the following sections. It is interesting to note, in any case, that this feeling of revolt took an unexpected turn in 1981: that year, fed up with the vexations of the high castes and the indifference of the authorities concerning them, many Harijans of Tamil Nadu converted to Islam. Unlike the massacres of the Harijans, these conversions stirred up the whole country's political class. All the political and religious authorities were in commotion. In the villages of Tamil Nadu, many Harijans discussed the reasons and the consequences of these conversions and envisaged the possibility of doing the same thing. They had at any rate discovered a weapon to make the government move. The untouchable organizations explained the conversions by the passivity and indifference of the authorities towards the problems of the most depressed classes. Athiyuthu, an untouchable hamlet which converted to Islam, is close to the town of Ramanathapuram, precisely where serious incidents had pitted Harijans against high caste people a few months before. Conversions spread to other villages in the area. There is little doubt that the incidents served as the detonator to the Harijans' decision, as some of them explained to the press.

These reactions show that the Harijans are still in two minds between submission and revolt. We are in an intermediary situation where the Harijans are conscious of all the discrimination and oppression to which they are victim. They still hesitate about the means of reacting against this situation. Untouchable organizations are becoming more and more active and it is possible to think that fewer and fewer untouchables will accept their condition in the future. The

Harijans are not always opposed to caste as an institution, but they are more and more resolved to put an end to untouchability.

There exist several organizations which defend the interests of the untouchables. To give some examples: the *Pirpattur Munetra Sangham* and the *Thalthapapattur Munetra Sangham.* A considerable number of Pallars and Hindu Paraiyars belong to these organizations. The Christians are absent from them, since they are not part of the Scheduled castes. Militant consciousness is thus much less among them than among the Hindus. The Christians are more isolated than the Hindus, less aggressive and more resigned even if their feelings concerning untouchability are the same.

The struggle of the untouchables will be long and hard since the high castes are not ready to accept dealing with the untouchables as equals. Their feeling of superiority towards the untouchables is still deeply ingrained, and it is surprising to see to what extent the traditional values are embedded in the collective consciousness of the high castes.

2.5) Relationships with other high castes: In the preceding paragraphs, I have tended to reduce the high castes to the Kallars alone. This is certainly an oversimplification, but the essential part of the relationships between Valghira Manickam and the high castes concerns the Kallars. None the less, I shall say a few words about the relationships with other castes.

The Udayars constitute the dominant caste within the Catholic Church. Its status is more or less equal to that of the Kallars and its members also consider themselves to be superior to the Paraiyars. Contacts with the Paraiyars are however somewhat limited. In general, the Paraiyars are jealous of the position occupied by the Udayars within the Catholic Church and they also feel their scorn.

I have not been able to make out much difference between Tanichavoorani and Kanda Devi. There are castes other than the Kallars in the first village, but their attitude is the same towards the untouchables. In addition, this village is smaller and it is above all to Kanda Devi that the villagers refer. I have therefore treated them as one conglomerate settlement as their proximity suggests.

The Chettiars constitute one of the most powerful castes in the region, but as a trading caste, it is above all an urban one and intervenes relatively little in rural life. The Paraiyars thus have few close contacts with this caste, although the villagers sometimes address

themselves to the Chettiar moneylenders for a loan, as we have seen. There is also a Chettiar who owns a brickyard and who employs a few families from the village, but this is a case of individual relationships between an employer and his employees.

The Brahmans being totally absent from the untouchable hamlets, there is no reason to mention them here except to note their refusal to have anything to do with the untouchables. They are never seen in the village and the villagers never address themselves to them.

3) Untouchability Between Untouchables: The Pallars of Pani Pulan Vayal

We may now examine the relationships between the Pallars and the Paraiyars, since the Pallars inhabit the same conglomerate settlement and are thus in daily contact with the inhabitants of Valghira Manickam. A preliminary remark has to be made: there is no organic relationship between the two communities, that is to say there is no kind of economic, political or ritual dependence between the two castes. There is simply a relationship which owes its existence to the fact of their being neighbours.

One of the questions that may be asked is about untouchability between these two castes. What precisely is the state of affairs? Here as well, it is necessary to distinguish between what the people concerned say and their behaviour. Traditionally, the Pallars are considered to be superior to the Paraiyars and this superiority is flaunted by the Pallars of Pani Pulan Vayal, some of whom call Valghira Manickam the *cêri*. The Paraiyars do not accept this superiority. For them, the Pallars are dirty and cheats. Generally speaking, commensality is one of the criteria which allow one to test the superiority of one caste over another. In this case, however, it is difficult to get a precise idea since both communities claim not to accept food from one another. This at least is the opinion of the majority. What happens in reality is more difficult to define since there are people who declare that, nowadays, such things no longer have any importance, and there are indeed people who make no difference.

A woman Pallar none the less claimed that it was unthinkable for a Pallar to accept food prepared by the Paraiyars because they eat beef. I then pointed out to this woman that her children ate every day the cereals prepared by the Paraiyars at the balwadi school. She was however not at a loss for words and objected, first, that this food

came from the parish and not from the Paraiyars. Next, that it was prepared in the church and not in a Paraiyar house. Finally, that the pan for preparing it was used for this and nothing else and therefore never contained beef. Despite this brilliant demonstration, we have every reason to believe that we are dealing with a rationalization. Not only do I suspect that the Pallars occasionally eat beef, but in addition, the arguments put forward do not contest the fact that it is the Paraiyars who prepare the meal. Now, it is precisely the status of the cook which is important for food to be accepted or not. For example, the Brahmans eat corn and rice which have been harvested by untouchables, but they would refuse any food which was prepared by them. It is therefore above all the cook who transmits pollution (Dumont 1966a: 182). Everything leads us to believe therefore that, despite certain of their assertions, the Pallars do not give so much importance to commensality, and we have already seen that the Paraiyars are not very fussy about questions of ritual purity.

There are few moments in daily life where the superiority of one of the two castes over the other becomes manifest. As we have seen, the two castes maintain no organic or ritual relationship and the Pallars have no rights over the Paraiyars. At the village tea shop, both communities drink from the same glasses. The Pallars none the less have a certain tendency to 'think themselves superior', that is to say, a tendency towards being a little disdainful towards the Paraiyars. But this does not go very far. 'The Pallars do not like seeing that the Paraiyars are their equals', say the latter. However discrimination stops there. In this respect, it is difficult to talk about untouchability between the two castes. Contacts between them are very limited, but open untouchability is not observed. The Paraiyars do not take water from the Pallars' water-pump. I thought that this was an example of untouchability, but I realized my mistake, when I saw some Paraiyar women using the pump in the middle of a group of Pallar women. It was explained to me that each community had its own source of water and it was therefore preferable to stick to one's own since reserves were limited.

If it is true that there is little untouchability between the two castes, this does not mean, as a result, that relationships are harmonious. Relationships can be described as cold and distant under normal circumstances. There is always a thunderstorm brewing, and the slightest spark is enough to set it off. As I have said earlier, Pani

Pulan Vayal represents another world. Although both conglomerate settlements are contiguous, when one goes into the Pallar village, one really has the impression of entering another village. The faces are not familiar, the children play among themselves and one does not come across a single Paraiyar. There is no taboo for the Paraiyars against going to the Pallars', but they have no reason to do so and therefore go there seldom. There are cases of friendship between Pallars and Paraiyars, but they are rather uncommon and in most cases are limited to good-neighbourliness: people talk a little to each other when they meet on the way to Devakottai, or drink tea together in a tea shop but intimacy rarely goes any further. Usually, Paraiyars and Pallars do not address one another by kinship terms. Even young people have few contacts. This separation is striking and contrasts with the cordiality which exists between Christian and Hindu Paraiyars. It shows to what extent the feeling of caste is still acute. Paraiyars do not feel at ease in the presence of Pallars from whom, however, they differ little.

The feeling of caste becomes even clearer when conflicts break out between the two communities. To be sure, they are not a daily occurrence, but they happen from time to time and help to reinforce mutual distrust. It seems that a serious problem occurred about ten years ago.

> A young Christian Paraiyar girl was supposed to have had a love affair with a Pallar boy. They were apparently caught together in the fields and the matter was blown out of proportion. The next day, the Pallars beat three young Christians who were going to the lavatory. The Christians fought back and a pitched battle ensued.

The Christians claim to have taught the Pallars a lesson, but the unilateral nature of my sources does not allow me to verify these statements.

There is no doubt that quarrels like this remain in the collective memory of each community, and rise to the surface at the first opportunity. The smallest quarrel between individuals can degenerate into a quarrel between the two communities, as is often the case in India. An insult directed at an individual is taken as an insult to the whole caste and a minor incident can spread like wildfire, and end up as a veritable caste war. Fortunately, at Valghira Manickam nothing like this has happened in recent years, as people avoid each other as much as possible in order to prevent quarrels. There were, for

example, quarrels at the tea shop which ended up with the Christians boycotting the tea shop in order not to make the situation worse. But after some time, the Christians started to go there again. The Christians also refused to intervene in the question of the road which we mentioned in Chapter Three.

> The Block Development Office at Devakottai (BDO) had made a guarantee for a sum of 68,000 rupees in order to build a proper road between the village and Devakottai. The parish priest obtained the contract and had work started. However, after a few days, the Pallars, who were led by a certain Kâlimuttu, refused the project on the pretext that the road had to go through their *kanmaï* (reservoir) and their territory. They demanded to be granted the contract, which was impossible. They none the less stopped the work from going on and the project was momentarily abandoned.
> A few months later, the quarrels between factions within the Pallar community led to the the majority faction, which was opposed to Kâlimuttu's faction withdrawing the objection and asking for the project to be continued.

During the whole time that this went on, the Christians displayed no frustration. The project was important to them, since it not only provided work for the coolies, but it also linked the village to the town. The cart-drivers especially, who were mostly Pallars, would have greatly profited by a proper road. The Christians were afraid of making the situation degenerate and they did not oppose the Pallars despite their bitterness.

The relationships between the Pallars and the Paraiyars thus oscillate between indifference and tension, between peaceful coexistence and cold war. Contacts between them are limited, and signs of untouchability are not really to be perceived. On the other hand, their respective caste identities are acute. The two communities are clearly distinct and avoid each other as much as possible. Some comradeship filters through these distant relationships, but these are infrequent. The Paraiyars mistrust the Pallars and vice versa. The Paraiyars refused to get involved in the Oonjanai incidents because they concerned Pallars. Love affairs between young people from the two communities can result in murder, as was the case in one village in the region. Here again, we can see to what extent caste still is the dominant social institution of the inhabitants of India. It provides the framework within which the essential part of social life takes place. As soon as people leave this framework, they find themselves in the

unknown and in insecurity. The relationship between the Paraiyars and the Pallars thus illustrates very well the importance of caste. Only economic dependence justifies relationships with other castes. Without this dependence, relationships are kept to a minimum in order to avoid conflicts.

D) Recapitulation and Conclusion

This brings us quite naturally to some conclusions about the nature of caste at Valghira Manickam. In the first place, it becomes evident that it is difficult for us to speak of it as a system. Interdependence between castes is becoming less and less marked. From an economic point of view, many relationships no longer have to do with the fact of belonging to a caste, but have become contractual. For example, the Paraiyars are no longer the servants of a particular landowning caste. Finally, from a ritual point of view, the Paraiyars have freed themselves from most of their obligations. They no longer perform tasks of scavenging and knackery which were incumbent on them in the past. They no longer play drums at funerals nor do they dig the graves of the high castes.

The Kallars have, despite everything, managed to keep up a certain amount of dependence on them among the Paraiyars. The latter hope to be able to rent land from the Kallars and sometimes borrow money from them, so that they sometimes still have to work for low wages for the Kallars and show them signs of respect. But this phenomenon is receding. Many villagers have only rare contacts with the Kallars.

In addition, untouchability is following the same movement. To be sure, the Harijans are still considered to be inferior, but they no longer accept their untouchability as easily. As Rudolph and Rudolph noted, the untouchables are less and less mobilizable vertically, that is to say they are less and less disposed to follow the high castes in their undertakings (1967: 153–4). On the contrary, they are more and more mobilized horizontally in untouchable organizations. As a parallel to this, the hierarchy within the untouchable sections of Valghira Manickam is relatively weak. There are no subdivisions and the accent on ritual purity is not very marked. We have found traces of these conceptions in the mythology of origin and in the self-representation of the Paraiyars, who do not accept their position in the system.

One could say that the Paraiyars contest more their position in the system than the system itself. They have no real alternative to this system. However, even when they reproduce this system, they do so in such a flexible fashion that it could be called lax or off-handed. The myths of origin certainly explain the origin of a certain division of labour, but they contest the very foundation of the system, i.e. that the birth of certain people is the reason for their degraded status. Basically, it is the theory of karma, according to which a man's position is explained by his acts in a previous life, which the myths of origin question. Status is presented as the result of chance, or as being of a contractual nature. There is no divine or even religious sanction accorded to the caste system.

In similar fashion, all the interpretations of the caste system are secular and materialist. For example, it is a king who divides up society according to professions. It is told, for instance, that long ago, the king needed messengers. So he asked the Paraiyars to go on horseback from village to village to announce news and edicts, to the sound of drums. This is how they became Paraiyars. The status of the caste is also attributed to a question of money. 'It is because we are poor that we are scorned', is a phrase that is often heard. People then quote the case of the untouchable doctors of Devakottai, who are completely respectable people and who have among their clients caste people. This, people say, is proof that money can make everything turn out right. Another example cited is of Ramanathan who works in Dubai and who also has the look of a high-caste person thanks to his money. 'A man like that has no problems', people say.

In this respect, it is possible to think that there is indeed a certain weakening of the values linked to the caste system at Valghira Manickam. The village itself was created on an untraditional basis, and interdependence between castes was never reproduced there since untouchability is constantly losing ground. It would however be false to predict, from the weakening of the caste system, that caste is inexorably doomed to disappear soon, as some would lead us to suppose (for example, Kuppuswamy 1972: 6). It is, on the contrary, reasonable to think that caste is being reinforced by becoming a more independent social entity. We have seen throughout this chapter that the hypothesis according to which caste provides the essential elements of non-economic social relationships is verified at Valghira Manickam. Even between Harijans, people are not really at ease, and

change of religion has not been enough to shatter the solid ties of caste, since Christians and Hindus still consider themselves as belonging to the same community. It thus seems that Indian society is progressively slipping from what Durkheim calls an organic society to a segmentary society, that is to say, solidarity based on similarity rather than on interdependence. In Kolenda's words (1978: 5), there is a passage from organic cooperative solidarity to competitive solidarity. This is what Dumont, very aptly, calls the 'substantialization' of caste (1966a: 280), that is to say the passage from a world where the accent is put on interdependence to 'a world of self-sufficient impenetrable blocks which are essentially identical and which are in competition with each other'. Caste appears here as a *collective individual*, that is to say that the individual defines his ideal with respect to the organization of society (ibid.: 23). It is evident that the recession of the professional specialization of castes during the twentieth century has strongly encouraged this phenomenon.

There is little doubt that the village of Valghira Manickam is already on its way to substantialization, even if the process is still limited. The absence of hierarchized subdivisions and the recent attempts, albeit timid, to look for spouses outside the habitual circle confirm this tendency which will doubtless be reinforced in the future, and will perhaps end up by producing 'pan-Paraiyar' organizations.

While untouchability is contested by the untouchables themselves, it is perpetuated by the high castes and is thus not yet on the point of disappearing completely. Among other things, the claims of the untouchables and their myths of origin which contest this untouchability have not yet had consequences in concrete action. In actual reality, the untouchables still remain in a state of submission, especially when they are individually in the presence of a member of a high caste. This attitude may be observed in everyday life. For example, at the beginning of our stay, some men, who were much older than I, got off their bicycle and went on, on foot, when they met me. This was obviously a sign of respect. In the same fashion, the old men systematically refused to sit in our presence and only consented to do so after much insistence. When a man who was taking part in our conversation wanted to leave, he asked humbly if he could do so because he 'had things to do'. Fortunately this attitude towards me became more flexible, but it demonstrates the

characteristic attitude of the untouchables who do not dare to put into practice the feeling of equality which their myths display. This attitude contrasts with that of the peasants like the Udayars who can be proud and arrogant; the Udayars do not stand on ceremony when they leave a group of people in conversation, which they do whenever they please, and swear in anybody's presence. The untouchables, especially the older ones, still uncover their heads in a Kallar's presence and speak in a respectful manner. Even today, when clothes are becoming less and less different, it is possible to recognize a Harijan by certain traits.

First of all, Harijans use certain words which are specific to them. For example, they speak about eating *kanji* (rice-water), while the high castes would say *'palayadi'*. The suffix *-tchi* is also typical of the Harijans. One's wife will be called *pondati* by a Harijan, while the high castes say, rather, *samsaran* or *manêvi*. The Harijans deform certain words by abbreviating them. There is also a whole series of characteristic attitudes which distinguish the Harijans from other people: we saw, for example, that they cross their arms on their chests when addressing a high-caste person. They do not easily go near someone, but keep a certain distance when speaking to him, or will call out to someone without going into his house. When they ask something, it is with excessive humility and they give the impression of begging. If there are too many high-caste people in a tea shop, or some other public place, they do not dare to go in and will stay apart. When a Harijan sits down, he does so in a discreet manner without spreading his legs or taking up too much space, trying not to get in the way. Such reserved attitudes and other signs can thus indicate that a stranger is a Harijan. Although one cannot be quite sure about this, it can at least put one on the right track. It is true that these traits have a marked tendency to disappear among young people. They show however that the Harijans themselves are not completely freed from untouchability and that, to a certain degree, they continue to foster the relationship of which they are victims. Thousands of years of oppression and degradation are not swept away in the space of a few days.

We saw at the beginning of this chapter that traditionally the untouchables were, at the same time, inside and outside the system. Their present-day efforts have a tendency to make them enter the system definitively, while the insistence on untouchability by the high

castes aims, on the contrary, at keeping them apart. In a secular State like India, the latter struggle constitutes rearguard action. The former privileges of the high castes will continue to disappear. This is the direction which History is taking. However it will not be accomplished without problems.

Some obstacles still oppose the eradication of untouchability in the village. These are the ancestral rights of the Kallars to land and territory and also their superiority. Finally, it should not be forgotten that the economic condition of the Harijans, as well as their lack, by and large, of education will considerably hinder their emancipation. They will not discover their dignity in illiteracy or poverty.

At Valghira Manickam, there is a well-known difference between Christians and Hindus concerning the attitude towards untouchability. The Christians, who are excluded from the lists of the Scheduled castes, are not very mobilizable and take little part in the emancipation movement. They are, so to speak, doubly marginalized since they are not even integrated into the Harijan movements. Conversions to Christianity have thus proved a bitter failure for the Harijans, who have in no way improved their status, but have become more and more cut off from the rest of their kind. We shall see that they have not received from the Catholic Church the consolations which one would expect from a Christian community. Christianity no longer attracts the underprivileged classes of India in any way and the Harijans of Tamil Nadu have preferred looking to Islam. It is however clear that these conversions will not solve the problem of untouchability.

5. Alliance and Kinship

It is not possible to talk about the life of the village without dealing with the question of kinship relations. The family, in the broad sense, represents an important framework in the life of the Paraiyars. While it is true that work, as we have seen, occupies a large part of their time, the family canalizes their affection, passions and worries. It is therefore family life and the search for new relatives which will now be the object of our attention. This does not constitute a complete break with the last chapter, but a continuity, and it is the relationship between caste and kinship which will retain our attention in the first place, in order to make the transition even clearer.

A) Caste and Kinship

Leach (1960: 7) has maintained that kinship was 'totally absent as a factor in the external systematic organization of caste'. The expression is perhaps exaggerated as the practice of hypergamy shows, but, as Leach himself recognizes, the internal relationships of caste are principally governed by kinship relations. There is no dichotomy between caste and kinship and, from this internal point of view, caste seems to be an extension of kinship. All members of the caste are considered as being members of the same family, 'even if we cannot say how', say the Paraiyars. A man is often capable of finding relationships of alliance with a stranger from his caste. One also hears people say that all Paraiyars are brothers and the Hindus consider the Christians in this way, as we saw in the last chapter. 'We must have had a common ancestor long ago', is still heard. Castes like the Vishwakarmas, who marry throughout Tamil Nadu, thus have relatives in several regions and if a man meets a stranger from his caste who comes from a distant region, it is likely that they will manage

to find some kind of kinship link by comparing their genealogies and the marriages of close relatives. Should this be the case, they will call each other by the appropriate terms of kinship. It is this kinship between members of a caste which makes a Paraiyar feel at ease with members of his caste. He is among his own, among people of the same blood. At Valghira Manickam, we have seen that all the Paraiyars are considered to be brothers even if few relationships are maintained with those who are outside the traditional marriage circle. None the less they are relatives and one can marry them, at least in theory. Within the marriage circle, this kinship becomes much more than theoretical: the community is so small, that a given person is a relative of almost everybody both on his father's side and on his mother's side, as we shall see later on. It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that the Nesavu Kara Paraiyar sub-caste is one big family and it is not necessary to go back very far in their genealogy to find common ancestors for most of the villagers. We shall have the opportunity to see illustrations of this fact below.

In any case, it is not uncommon to hear a Paraiyar claim loud and clear that he is related to everybody in the village or that another given village is a village of relatives. We saw in the last chapter that caste provides the social framework within which the Paraiyars are at ease, and that the essential elements of his social relationships are situated within the caste. In this paragraph we have given some more details about this assertion, since we have said that caste now appears to us to be a greatly extended family. Relationships within the caste are ruled by relations of kinship and alliance. The caste is endogamous and a Paraiyar will shun inter-caste marriages. Even young people think that such marriages are doomed to failure since one of the parties will always consider itself superior to the other. On the other hand, within the Paraiyar caste—because everybody is family—everybody is also equal and such problems do not arise. Marriage is isogamous and any relationship within the caste unites people of equal status. It is now possible to understand better why, as we saw in the last chapter, social hierarchy does not permeate all the social relationships and why there are no hierarchized units within the caste.

This relationship between caste and kinship is not unique. It is found more or less everywhere in India. In Kangra, Parry (1979: 85) showed that the term *jati*, which is generally translated as 'caste', in fact means 'species' and reports that one of his informants compared

the castes to different species of wood. Members of a caste are thus made of the same wood, i.e. their common blood is different from that of the other castes. It is often believed that a common ancestor was the founder of the caste. Caste obviously extends beyond the closer family circle since one has to marry within the caste. This does not mean that every marriage is incest since every society tolerates marriage of relatives up to a certain degree. In North India, the *sapinda* rule allows marriage with a relative who is more than seven degrees removed on the father's side and four degrees on the mother's side. In South India, cross-cousin marriage is encouraged and so many marriages unite close relatives. Even in North India, as Mayer underlines (1960: 4), 'people do not like to marry into the unknown' and the fact is truer still among the Paraiyars where people are always afraid of venturing too far away.

We saw in the last chapter that the caste holds an important place in the life of the Paraiyars. This privileged position, as we have just said, is itself explained by the fact that the caste is simply an extension of the family. It thus goes without saying that the family represents a lot to the Paraiyars, and this importance gives us the key for understanding their institutions. It is therefore essential to say a word about this, but also to show its limits before going further with our analysis.

B) The Importance of the Family

In traditional societies, kinship relations play a fundamental role. This is the case among the Paraiyars. Kinship relations govern the essential elements of their lives, once economic obligations are put aside. Before being an individual, a Paraiyar is a member of a group. This appears clearly in the fact that the Paraiyars attach little importance to the name of a child, as we shall see later on. Right from birth, a child is identified with the family in which he is born and the Paraiyars put little emphasis on the personality of an individual. Here the individual is collective. For example, two children can be comrades during childhood, despite the fact that their families have a quarrel; once they are adults they will have to adopt the enmities of their parents and perpetuate them from one generation to another.

Solitude is something monstrous for a villager. Like most Indians, he is never alone and is afraid of being so. Thus, one has always to be surrounded by members of his family. If somebody has to spend

some time in hospital, several members of his family will follow him there, and will camp around the hospital. The women from the village found it hard to accept that my wife was regularly alone at home. They advised her to come to the village and sit with them. If someone comes up against a problem, it is his family who will help him to solve it and will defend him against his enemies. Even if the person in question is in the wrong, there will always be members of the family to give him support. For example, the villagers complain that they can do nothing against a fickle woman since her family will always oppose any sanctions. If a man occupies an important position, he will inevitably attempt to drag the members of his family after him.

Inversely, if disgrace or misfortune strikes an individual, it is the whole family which is besmirched. If someone commits a serious offence, it is possible that the goddess Mariyamman will strike his family and not necessarily the individual himself. If a girl shows immoral sexual conduct, it is her whole family who has to suffer the consequences, and her sisters will have difficulty in finding a husband, however moral their conduct might be. A family which does not reject one of its members who has committed an offence is considered as being a party to the offence. For example, if a son breaks off an engagement and runs away with another girl, the boy's father has to disown his son, otherwise he will be considered by the other party as having condoned the union.

This family solidarity continues after death: people believe that the deceased in paradise intercede for their families to God and try to obtain all possible advantages, as if they were relatives who are in Dubai or Kuwait. On the other hand if they are in suffering, or are in hell, it is the whole family who is affected.

Having relatives means being strong. Founding a family is the aim of life. Celibacy is something rare which can only be explained by a malformation or some other problem. In the same fashion, a couple without children cannot live happily. A man without children will complain that he will not have enough relatives for his future. People are sorry for a family without relatives in the village and the family is considered to be unhappy. It is not uncommon to hear that a widow without a family has committed suicide. Araï married a widower who had many children. She herself had no children and after her

husband's death, she bewailed the fact that her husband's children no longer looked after her because, 'they are not of the same blood'.

A man has the right to arrive without warning at one of his relatives' houses and stay there as long as he wishes, even if he has not been seen for several years. Someone who emigrates always has the right to come back some day to his village. If someone has some savings, or makes a good living, he will always be approached by relatives who will expect financial help from him. People are at home in a close relative's house. At religious festivals, several families of relatives come and spend a few days at home and they have to be fed properly since, in their host's words, 'they only come to eat'; he immediately adds that he does exactly the same thing with his parents. As a general rule, people trust their relatives more than they trust anyone else: Arulraj, who owns a brickyard, brought several families of his relatives to come and work there.

Close relatives meet at all important occasions, like the ceremonies for the first menstruation, weddings, festivals and funerals. When problems occur, families also meet, even if several members are in conflict with each other. For example, when Valluvan was beaten by a young man in front of the village church, his brothers, with whom he was in conflict, joined up with his son-in-law to go and avenge him since the honour of the family had been wounded. (This solidarity means that the rupture between the families is not (yet) complete and irreversible). In the same fashion, a man who has abandoned his wife, his daughter and the rest of his family because of black magic is still sensitive about his family's behaviour and will be put to shame if one of his close relatives behaves badly.

The family is even more than all this since it is also part of daily life. It is with the members of one's family that one lives, has fun and ... quarrels. It is an aunt or grandfather who will look after a child; a woman will go to grind her peppers, or tell her sorrows, to one of her relatives. The family is omnipresent in social life and even friendships are often grafted onto kinship relations.

It thus appears clearly that kinship relations continue to dominate social life and they explain to a large extent the cohesion of Paraiyar society. Without a family, a man is nothing. It is here that we grasp one of the essential elements of the Paraiyars' social organization. Relationships within the caste are almost entirely kinship relations, as we saw in the preceding paragraph. This is all the more true, as

there is practically no difference between consanguinity and affinity among the Paraiyars since, in principle, marriage unites close relatives. Relationships with affines are thus essentially the same as those with consanguines: a girl's father-in-law is often her mother's brother; in the same fashion, a boy's mother-in-law is his father's sister. Everything takes place within the family and the repetition of this type of marriage further accentuates the family's importance since each new marriage simply reinforces existing family ties.

Before examining the operative conditions of this type of marriage, several remarks have to be made. First of all, the importance of the family has its limits. A glance at what has just been said could make one think that the omnipresence of kinship relations would result in the appearance of large and inseparable extended families. Since the Paraiyars cannot live without a family, should this not imply that several couples will be naturally brought to live together under the same roof? In fact, things are far from being as simple as that, and it is rather the opposite which takes place. A couple has only one desire: that of leaving their parents' house and living alone in their own house. Hence, there are virtually no 'extended families' in the village but, and this fact is even more striking, brothers have a marked tendency to quarrel and not to be on speaking terms. There are, so to speak, no brothers without quarrels. Even with parents, quarrels are frequent, and black magic is above all used against close relatives. We are thus again dealing with the conflict which exists between the centrifugal and centripetal forces of Paraiyar society, the conflict between the 'individualist' tendencies of each member and the importance of family relationships. This conflict is partially resolved by the limitation of family units: although an individual has hundreds of relatives, he only maintains active relations with a restricted number of them. There is little family regrouping with a large number of individuals. Even the parties involved in marriages are rarely more than five or seven persons. Marriage with a cousin demonstrates the same fear of venturing out into the unknown: it is so much easier to marry a close relative. This ambivalence of Paraiyar society is found elsewhere.

The socio-economic conditions of the past did little to encourage the formation of large family units. On the contrary, they tended to provoke the development of restricted units. It seems that the Paraiyars have always lived in nuclear families, a phenomenon which

can be found among the tribes of India, in particular among the Bhils of central India (see Deliège 1985). At Valghira Manickam, the lack of property seems to reinforce this tendency. It is perhaps symptomatic to observe that the only extended family I came across (a mother and four married sons with their families and an unmarried younger brother) was precisely a family from Sebastianpatnam who owned land.

The importance of kinship relations does not therefore stand up to all the strains that are put on it. It also implies obligations and duties which keep up these ties: a man who does not invite his parents to family ceremonies, or who refuses to help them in case of need, condemns himself to breaking his ties with his family. This was the case of Kâlimuttu who, for example, did not invite his brothers to take part in ceremonies that the marriage of his daughter entailed. To refuse to give a daughter in marriage to one's maternal uncle's son can also lead to ties being broken. Jealousy is a constant source of conflict within the family and necessitates, in extreme cases, the use of black magic. The Paraiyars have difficulty in putting up with social differentiation among themselves. They are also afraid of any kind of centralization of authority, so that they have little tolerance for the formation of large family groups.

It is possible to think that it is precisely this feeling of internal equality which stops the grouping together of the Paraiyars, who accept with difficulty another Paraiyar's authority since they are so used to receive orders from on high, that is to say from the high castes. In most cases, it is because of quarrels concerning authority that families split up. Similarly, there is little respect for old age among the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam. In the past, as Mandelbaum notes (1970: I, 49), poverty worked against extended families: low life expectancy was (and is) a result of poverty; a man often used to die before his sons had children so that the essential elements for the constitution of authority were lacking among the untouchables. The same author considers that economic factors explain the tendency of the untouchables to live in nuclear families: while the high castes have in common rights to land, the Harijans become rapidly self-sufficient from an economic point of view. A son will rapidly earn as much (in fact, as little) as his father, and so the latter does not have an economic hold over his children. Quarrels over the distribution of food in a family inevitably lead to separations among

the Chamars: a man who has only one child does not really see why he should share his meagre ration of food with his brother's three children. At Valghira Manickam also, quarrels often occur because of the distribution of food: when several married couples live in the same house, everybody watches closely to see how the women serve food, and complaints against a sister-in-law, or a daughter-in-law, giving too large a helping to their husbands often result in families splitting up. Women who, unlike high caste women, earn a living are less submissive and have difficulty in putting up with the fact that their earnings are spent by their mothers-in-law. Hence it is often the wife who is at the root of the separation, by threatening to go back to her parents' if the husband does not assume his responsibilities by putting an end to a situation which she considers intolerable. The case is frequent at Valghira Manickam where such threats are, in addition, often carried out.

This greater independence of the Paraiyars should not lead us to believe that they do not consider the family important. Rather the reverse is true, as we have shown in this paragraph. It is interesting to note that a young couple rarely settles down alone after having got married. The husband inevitably attempts to live with his wife at his parents' in the first place. It is only after frequent quarrelling, which is just as inevitable, that he will finally decide to settle down in his own house. The ease of building houses is an additional reason for successfully undertaking such a project. These hopeless attempts at living with one's parents show the conflict which exists between dependence on the family and the independence of the couple. We shall have the opportunity to come back to this later. We shall content ourselves here with noting the important place which the family has in the life of the Paraiyars. Their desire for independence can in no way cause this importance to be forgotten.

C) Marriage

1) Marriage and Reciprocity

On the contrary, the Paraiyars accord great importance to reinforcing their alliances and, if possible, to creating new ones. Marriage is the privileged means for consolidating one's own family situation or even for making new family ties. Louis Dumont was able to show that marriage is not only the institution which dominates all social life in

India (1966a: 143), but that it also expresses 'the totality of society' (1975b: 100). It is the most prestigious of family ceremonies and, in general, the most costly. It constitutes a veritable obsession for fathers of young girls. It often implies complicated ceremonies and constitutes one of the principal causes of debt, and can go as far as ruining certain families. Among the Paraiyars, weddings do not have the lavish and costly character which is to be found everywhere else in India, but they are nevertheless events of crucial importance. They allow family ties to be reinforced or even facilitate the solving of family problems. If a man does not have relatives, marriage is the means of entering a family, that is to say, ensuring for himself the existence of allies or partners. Without a family, a man is nothing. It is thus important to preserve family ties as much as is possible. This is the main preoccupation when entering into a marriage.

Before analysing in depth the practical conditions of Paraiyar marriage, it will be as well to explain again the rule on which it is based. As we now know, marriage is directly linked to the important place occupied by the family among the Paraiyars: it constitutes the means of conserving or creating family ties. However, this process cannot take place as one chooses: it has to follow certain rules. Reciprocity is the essential rule which governs relationships between human beings. Malinowski (1960), and later Mauss (1973), have clearly shown that reciprocity is the presiding factor in exchanges between human beings. Lévi-Strauss had the merit of showing that exchange is a fact, a kind of axiom of social life (1973: xxxviii) and that human beings not only exchange goods but also words, in language, and finally women (1958: 95). Lévi-Strauss showed that societies which have a positive rule of marriage perfectly illustrate this axiom of exchange: a woman who is received inevitably has to be rendered (1967: 73).

The Paraiyars practise marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin and are thus situated within the framework of the theory defended by Lévi-Strauss. Their social structure is based on an exchange of women who thus circulate between families. In point of fact, this is how they themselves explain this form of marriage. If a Paraiyar is questioned on this subject, he often replies:

'If I give my sister to a family, I lack a girl and so I have the right to require another in return. The other family has to give me one in return. It is always necessary to pay back.'

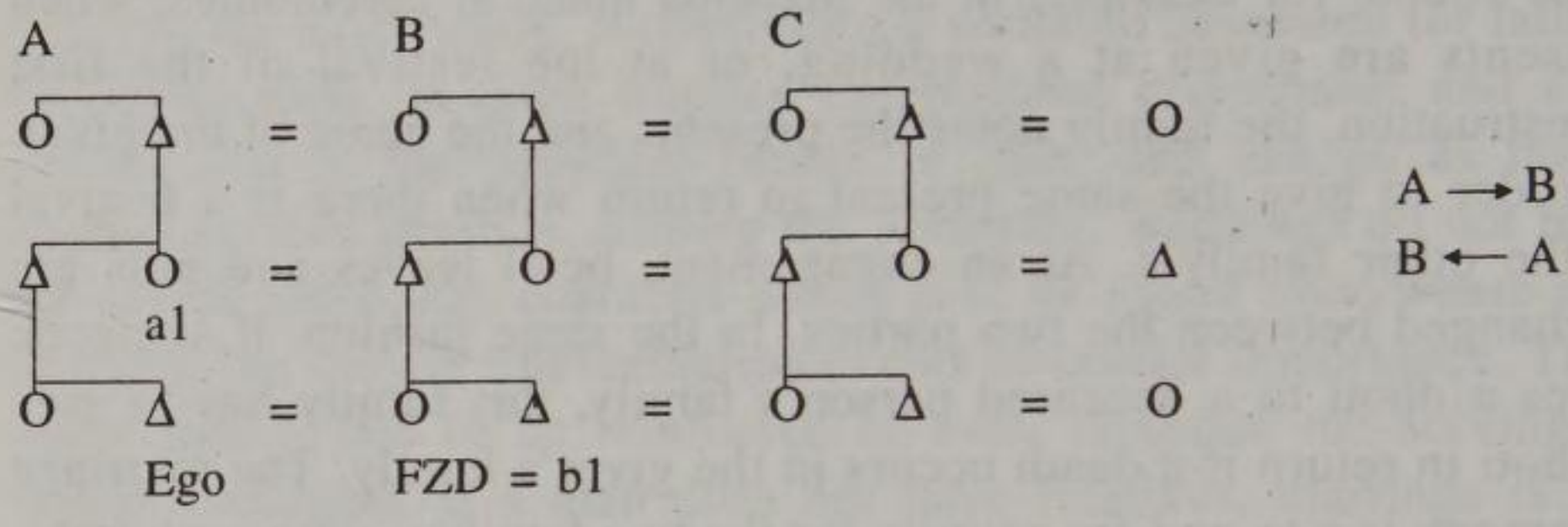
Reciprocity is not only the basis of matrimonial exchanges. It is to be found, for example, in the presents made at ceremonies: when presents are given at a wedding, or at the festival of the first menstruation, the family notes the presents and the name of the giver, in order to give the same present in return when there is a festival at the other family's. At an engagement, betel leaves and nuts are exchanged between the two parties. In the same fashion, if someone gives a dhoti to a deceased person's family, this family has to give a dhoti in return if a death occurs in the giver's family. The marriage ceremony is a to-and-fro activity for the two families, with each family having to give a meal which is at least equivalent to the one prepared by the other family. There thus exist ties of mutual obligation which unite the members of a kinship group. Marriage is only one aspect, a striking one it is true, of these ties. Other aspects exist however. In a neighbouring village, I heard of a case of vendetta: a Pallar had killed a Paraiyar. The Paraiyars then decided to kill a Pallar saying, 'We have lost a man, they must therefore lose one as well.' Finally, we shall have the opportunity of seeing that the essential element of the religious life of the Paraiyars is based on the idea that, in order to obtain the favour of the gods, it is necessary to give them something in exchange. Making a vow is the way of expressing this exchange between men and the world of the gods.

2) Why Marry a Cousin?

We have just seen one of the fundamental reasons which explain the system of marriage with a cross-cousin. As the theoretical model of patrilateral marriage demonstrates, a woman who is given away by one generation will be replaced by the next generation. In other words there is deferred reciprocity.

Diagram 1 shows clearly that A1 was given by family A to family B during generation 1. B hence owes a woman to A, who will be given in return, according to the rule of marriage, during generation 2 since the daughter of A1 (B1) will be married to A1's (Ego's) brother's son. The cycle is thus completed. It is clear that this model is a theoretical one, and we shall have the opportunity of seeing that Paraiyar marriages are not always as straightforward. What is important to understand here is that a woman who is given away is regained in the following generation. There is therefore reciprocity, as the Paraiyars themselves state. The system insures a balance in women between the families, and at the same time unites two families over

Diagram 1: Theoretical model of marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin.



more than one generation. Family A is in a position to give and receive women with respect to B. Marriages are repeated and the families are united. Alliance is thus the corollary of the exchange between the two families. In each generation, the ties which unite the two families are repeated. We shall have the opportunity of illustrating this phenomenon later on, but beforehand it is necessary to make some general remarks.

The reasons given above are the basis of this system of marriage. It would be incorrect, however, to conclude that each Paraiyar recreates the conditions of the system at every marriage. The Paraiyars practise marriage with a cousin above all because they belong to a cultural environment, in this case that of South India, which practises this type of marriage. This is obviously an essential element, since our aim is not to search here for the origin of this institution, but rather to explain its functioning. What we have to aim at seeing is how the system works and what induces the Paraiyars to perpetuate it. Although it is true that the Paraiyars practise this type of marriage because they belong to a given cultural environment where the system is almost completely generalized, it is none the less a fact that the rule is not always absolute, and that a girl's father often has the opportunity of not renewing this type of alliance, as we shall see later on. In this respect, it is necessary for the father to obtain for himself certain advantages in applying the system, otherwise it would gradually fall into disuse.

According to Louis Dumont (1975b: 34), this is already the case in certain castes in Tamil Nadu (for example the Arupangu Maravars), who today aim at making alliances which are financially beneficial rather than renewing the traditional ties. Among the Christian Paraiyars, the system is still strong, perhaps because they have little hope of improving their economic situation by marriage. Be that as

it may, the Paraiyars still see good reasons for renewing this kind of alliance and think about doing things in this way at each marriage.

I have already said that a girl who is given away has to be 'given back'. In certain cases, the obligation of marriage is absolute. If I have given a girl, I can take one in return and the allied family has a rigorous obligation to give me a girl in return. There can be no discussion in a case such as this. There is an obligation to give in return. However once a girl has been given in return, nothing really obliges me to give another girl again to this family. The question then arises of knowing why this is done, despite everything.

We already know the essential reply to this question. It is a matter of perpetuating an alliance and tightening ties with one's own kin. Let us suppose that I give my sister in marriage to X, who lives in another village. My sister will never cut off her ties with her own family. On the contrary, I will be indispensable for the various ceremonies and rites of passage concerning her children, my sister will come back to my house to give birth and will frequently make visits to her native village. If she has problems with her husband's family, she will always address herself to her kin who will defend her or find her a place of refuge. The ties with the original family are thus always maintained. In a society where this type of marriage is recognized and even encouraged, my sister will always want to give her daughter in marriage to my son, in order to make our families even closer still, and prove that her departure was not an irremediable loss, since she is giving us her daughter in return. There is more here than simple reciprocity since, if my sister only has one son and no daughters, while I myself have a daughter, she will inevitably attempt to take my daughter for her son even if family A has already given two daughters to family B. Alliance is more important than reciprocity. This is not simply a theoretical possibility: such cases are frequent and take place regularly in the village.

Quarrels therefore arise frequently between spouses in order to decide on whose side a daughter or son should be married. The mother will insist on marrying them on her brother's side, the father on his sister's side. This provokes situations which are sometimes difficult since, by choosing one side, there is a serious risk that the other party will be put out. In any case, marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin is an ideal, but the Paraiyars often are obliged to agree recourse to marriage with a matrilateral cousin.

Alliance thus appears as the fundamental reason which induces the Paraiyars to practise marriage with a cross-cousin, as we suggested in the preceding section. The aim is to preserve the ties between two families, avoid cutting oneself off and finding oneself in isolation. We know that the Paraiyars prefer solid ties with a few families having multiple relationships. Marriage is situated in this perspective. Here is how a Pallar from Pani Pulan Vayal explains why he prefers to marry his daughters to a close relative:

> Let us suppose that my daughter gets married to my sister's son and that I go to pay a visit to her in his village. I reach the house, but everybody is away and the door is closed with a palm leaf according to the custom when nobody is at home. Now at my sister's I am at home. I can go in, take some food, make myself something to eat and make myself at home. This is perfectly normal since it is my sister's house. If, on the other hand, I marry the same daughter to a stranger, in similar circumstances, I do not have the right to go in, since my daughter would be sharply criticized by her in-laws who would say that her father has no manners, that he came to steal food, that he is taking advantage of the situation, etc. You can see why it is better to marry your daughter to close relatives.

Rather than seeking out new and fragile ties, this man prefers reinforcing the old ones. The advantage is also clear for young people who are married to close relatives rather than going out into the unknown. Relationships are often strained between a newly wedded girl and her in-laws. If, on the other hand, her father-in-law is also her mother's brother, such difficulties are largely toned down. After her parents' death, the girl will be in security in her husband's family. Her *mâma* (mother's brother), who owes her protection, will be there to support her. On the other hand, if she is married to a stranger the *mâma* will be less disposed to look after her, especially if he himself has a son who could have married this girl. The alliance will have been refused, if not broken, so that a certain coolness can settle in between the two families. Should the *mâma* then wish to marry his son to his niece, there is little to stop him doing so, unless he wants to run the risk of breaking off the ties between the two families. In point of fact it is normally incumbent on the *mâma* to arrange a girl's marriage.

For the girl, married life will be less harsh if she marries into her mother's family. Her *mâma* will make sure that she is not given too much work to do, that she is not beaten, etc. Her parents know the

family better and have more confidence in them. In brief, it is clear that it is the desire to preserve existing family ties which explains Paraiyar marriage with a cross-cousin. They clearly insist on this point: it is necessary to preserve relationships in the family; it is necessary not to become isolated. They say, 'With such a marriage, the family remains united.' Marriage with a cross-cousin is a repetition of previous marriages. The object is to make the same marriages as one's parents and preserve in this way the same allies.

3) The Rule of Marriage: Compulsory or Preferential?

It will be useful here to remember that the Paraiyars have a system of patrilateral filiation and inheritance. The children belong to their father's family and property is transmitted from father to son. As a general rule, marriage is virilocal although this rule suffers numerous exceptions, as we shall see later on. In this section, we shall first of all examine the different modes of application of the rule of marriage, and we shall see if this rule is compulsory or obligatory for each individual, or is it only preferential, that is, a preference but not an obligation.

Tamil kinship vocabulary divides relatives into two categories: consanguines and affines (see Dumont 1957: 273-81). This terminology is consistent with marriage of cousins since it distinguishes between the consanguine category (brothers and sisters) and the category of affines. Thus, a girl will call an affine boy who is older than she *maccân*, a word which also means 'husband'. In addition, this terminology is classificatory, in the sense that each term designates a certain number of individuals: for example, an elder brother is called *annan* but the same is true of the brother's father's sons (parallel cousins) who are older than Ego (FBeS) and so on (for example, FFBSS, etc.). In the same way, still in accordance with the rule of marriage, *mâma* designates both the mother's brother, the father-in-law, the father's sister's husband, etc.

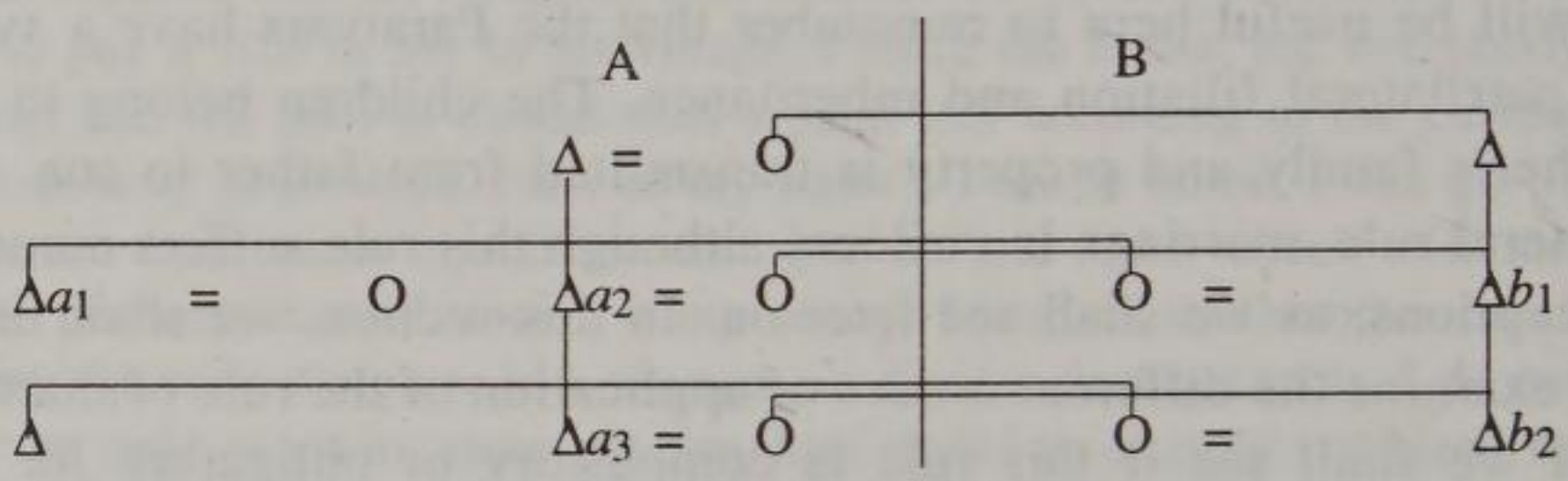
There are therefore no very striking peculiarities among the Paraiyars, apart from the fact that the father's sister's daughter (*attai magal*) is called *attachi*, which is unusual. Again, like the Kallars, the Hindu Paraiyars call their father *ayya*, while the Christians call him *appa*.

The rule of marriage forbids any marriage with the members of one's father's section, the *pangâli*, whereas it indicates 'cross-cousins' as desirable spouses. For a boy, the ideal form of marriage

is to marry his *attai magal*, his father's sister's daughter (FZD). Reciprocally, this girl will thus marry her mother's brother's son (MBD) or *mâma magan*. This ideal rule is represented in Diagram 1 but, as we shall see, such a case is implausible since it supposes an ideal arrangement.

In reality, the situations encountered are much more complicated, like the example given in Diagram 2.

Diagram 2: Exchange of women between two families from Valghira Manickam



The diagram is not very orthodox, but it shows how the girls move from one family to another. In fact, at the second and third generations, there was a direct exchange between the two families since a girl went from A to B and from B to A each time by combining patrilateral and matrilateral marriages. It can be noted that:

A1 married a stranger
A2 married his MBD
A3 married his FZD (who is also MBD)
B1 married his FZD
B2 married his MBD

It should none the less be noted that A is not a nuclear family, since A1 and A2 live completely apart. B1 and his son B2 have made similar marriages since both of them have taken a wife from A1 (the sister for B1 and the daughter for B2). In compensation, B1 gave his sister to A2 and his daughter to A3, but it should be noted that A1's family has still not received anything. In fact, A1 had only one son, who was not yet of marriageable age and so, as a result, he had not yet been able to take a girl from B1 who, in actual fact, had no daughters left. The diagram indicates at any rate that B gave three

women to A, who at that time had given two in return. It clearly shows, however, that there is an exchange between the two families.

A second fundamental element of this diagram is the combination of patrilateral and matrilateral marriages: in fact, the rule of marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin is not absolute. If one asks a Paraiyar on which side a boy should marry, he will certainly reply 'on the father's side', but he will immediately add that, if this is not possible, then he should turn to the mother's side. Both sides are thus open. We have already seen that, if for some reason or other, it is impossible for a boy to marry his FZD he can then turn to his MBD. Numerous marriages attest to this alternation.

Table 10 gives the occurrences of the different types of marriage. A few remarks are required. Columns 1 and 2 only concern marriages with first cousins. In column 3, I have included marriages with second cousins. Column 4 includes marriages with 'distant relatives' but not 'marriages with strangers', as the Paraiyars themselves say. This column therefore also contains marriages which respect the rule but in a less direct fashion.

Table 10: Types of marriage in Valghira Manickam

	1	2	3	4	5
Community	FZD	MBD	Second degree	Distant relative	Total
Christians	24	15	7	50	96
Hindus	1	4	2	22	29
Total	25	19	9	72	125

It clearly appears from this table that the Hindus have somewhat tended to abandon this type of marriage which now only represents 24 per cent of the sample taken. Among the Christians, on the other hand, almost half of the marriages (48 per cent) still adopt unions with close relatives. This fact is rather striking, if one takes into account the fact that column 4 contains a certain number of marriages which respect this norm as well. This figure (42 per cent) is at any rate much higher than the one given by Ghurye (1969: 262), who considers that 17 per cent of Tamil marriages are preferential. It is true that, if one takes the Hindu Paraiyars into account, our figures are considerably lower. Marriage habits seem to show, once again,

that the Christians are perhaps more traditional than the Hindus of Valghira Manickam.

The table next shows that preference for a patrilateral cross-cousin is weak. It is only slightly higher than preference for a matrilateral cousin, which is in point of fact preferred by the Hindus. This fact can be compared with the theory put forward by R. Needham (1962). According to this author, the system of marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin is virtually impossible (p. 115), and no system is based solely on this principle (pp. 106, 118). Needham's argument is that, in a patrilateral system, FZD would be equivalent to MMBDD and would therefore also be a matrilateral cousin. This is why, according to Needham, marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin always results in being accompanied by matrilateral forms. Dumont (1975b: 46) has shown that, in the same way, the castes of South India who practise patrilateral marriages always have cases of matrilaterality. Although de Heusch has contested Needham's assertions by arguing that they are contradicted by the case of the Pende (de Heusch 1971: 72 ff.), it seems that Needham was not wrong as far as the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam are concerned. Here as well, each relative soon becomes bilateral, as we shall demonstrate a little further on, whereas a strictly matrilateral system would prevent such confusion. In addition, we have seen that a matrilateral cousin is often chosen as spouse.

But there is more to it than that. Needham goes on to remark that the patrilateral system brings with it a structural weakness, by preventing the constitution of 'corporate groups' (1962: 115) since a lineage is both wife-giver and wife-taker with respect to the same partners. As Lévi-Strauss puts it, patrilateral marriage only links groups two at a time and implies that, at each generation, there is a complete reversal of all the 'cycles' (1958: 135), whereas marriage with a matrilateral cousin presupposes a global structure of society (1967: 520). The system of generalized exchange which results from matrilateral cross-cousin marriage encourages anisogamy, that is to say, status differentiation within a homogeneous society. In other words, patrilateral marriage fits in better with an absence of authority and does not encourage social differentiation by fixing once and for all the position of one group with respect to another. Alternation is the rule here. No one family is permanently inferior to another since the situation is reversed in each generation. In the same way, as Need-

ham has shown (1962: 17), a society which practises this type of marriage is constantly out of balance. His conclusion, on the same page, about patrilateral marriage is the following:

> Since it has no systematic character and does not produce an organic type of solidarity, a society based upon it is always in a precarious position.

Matrilateral marriages are more frequent precisely because they encourage better integration, whereas the patrilateral type 'is always in a precarious position'. This brings us quite naturally to the Paraiyars whose weak integration is already known to us. We can observe that their rule of marriage in no way encourages solidarity between different lineages and does not manage to impose itself as a system. This is therefore what explains the relatively high occurrence of matrilateral marriages at Valghira Manickam.

A boy could be married to his maternal uncle's daughter, even if there is an available cousin in his paternal aunt's family. I have said before that when a marriage is to take place, the mother will try to marry her son on her side, while the father will have in mind his own family. This rivalry can even result in quarrels, whereas if the rule were an absolute one such a choice would not arise. This also seems to show that, for the Paraiyars, alliance is more important than direct reciprocity.

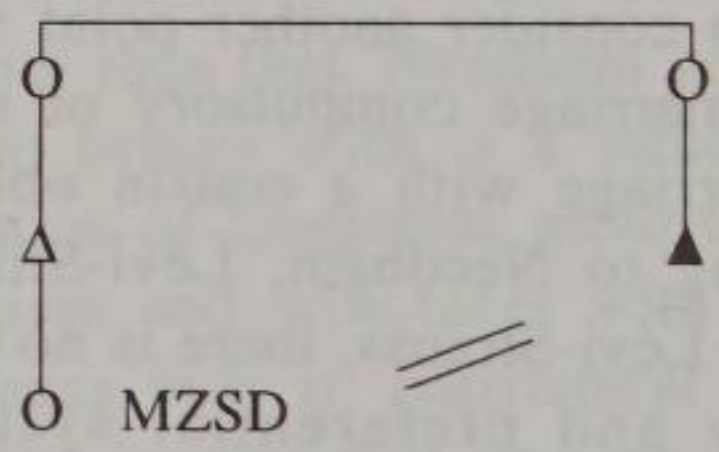
This brings us to consider another point which Needham brings up: is the rule of marriage compulsory or simply preferential? In other words, is marriage with a cousin obligatory or simply encouraged? According to Needham, Lévi-Strauss confused the two terms. However, for Lévi-Strauss, there is no essential difference between compulsory and preferential systems. As the French anthropologist notes (1967: xvii), societies do not manage to act in conformity with a rule of marriage, except in a certain number of cases. Hence (ibid.: xx), a system is compulsory when it is looked at from the point of view of the model, and preferential when it is looked at from the point of view of reality.

An analysis of Paraiyar society tends to support this last assertion. In many cases it is not possible to marry a cousin. The pattern given in Diagram 1 is too theoretical: it supposes that each couple has *one* son and *one* daughter and, in addition, that male and female cousins have more or less the same age. The real situations are quite different. There are couples who have no children, others have only daughters or sons; finally some boys are sometimes twenty years older than

their preferential cousin. Some families are at loggerheads and this excludes any kind of marriage. Finally, a boy or a girl can refuse to marry their cousin and even elope with someone else. In brief, there are numerous situations which render marriage between cousins impossible, in which case, other solutions have to be found.

As we saw above, the first solution which comes to mind is the maternal uncle's daughter; many factors draw this solution to the fore. When a man discusses his daughter's marriage, he is often heard to say that nobody is available, neither on his side nor on his wife's side, or again that they are going to marry their son on his wife's side because there is no one on his own side. Marriage with a maternal uncle's daughter is thus, so to speak, a second-best choice. It is true that, as Needham has shown, the confusion which results from a patrilateral system of marriage brings with it a kind of bilaterality among relatives. This is the case among the Paraiyars for whom ties of kinship have such multiple connections, because of this system, that it is not uncommon for a man to marry his sister! This is what happened to Gnanamuttu: on his mother's side, his wife is his daughter as is shown in Diagram 3.

Diagram 3: Relationship between Gnanamuttu and his wife on his mother's side



Gnanamuttu's wife is the daughter of a brother (MZS) and she is therefore herself a daughter to Gnanamuttu. From this point of view, she is forbidden to him, but on his father's side, she is perfectly acceptable as shown in Diagram 4:

According to this diagram, Gnanamuttu's wife is his FZD and thus his preferential spouse. Both situations are represented in Diagram 5 which shows clearly the bilaterality of Gnanamuttu's marriage.

Cases such as this are frequent in the village because kinship ties resulting from preferential unions are extremely confused. Another example appears in Diagram 6 which gives the relationships between Arockyam and his wife.

Diagram 4: Relationship between Gnanamuttu and his wife side

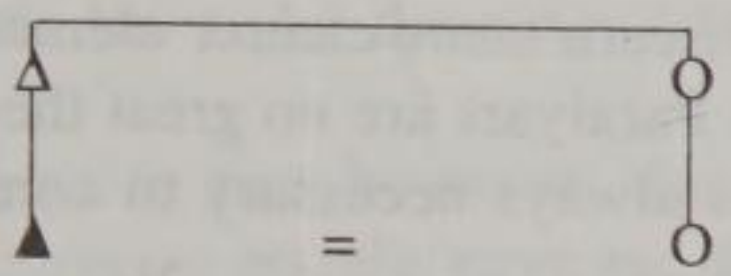


Diagram 5: Bilateral relationships between Gnanamuttu and his wife

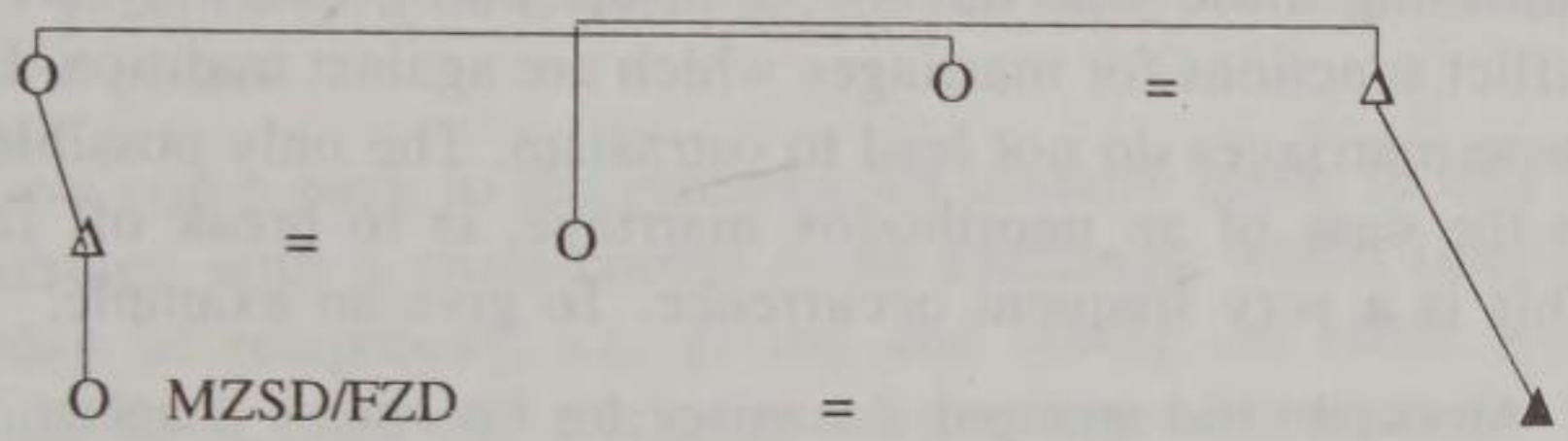
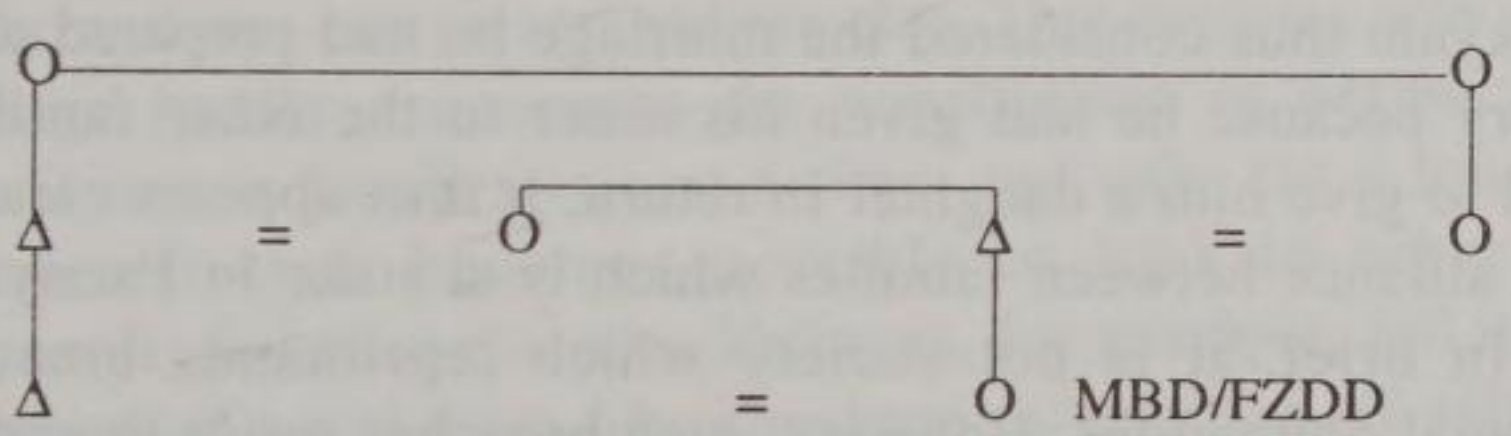


Diagram 6: Relationship between Arockyam and his wife



Arockyam's wife is thus his *mâma magal* (MBD), on his mother's side, but also *magal* (daughter = FZDD), on his father's side. Arockyam's mother-in-law would thus be his ideal wife. But she is too old for him and was married long before Arockyam was of marriageable age. He therefore took her daughter, who was his MBD, and therefore perfectly acceptable. In other words, one may say that there is no essential difference for the Paraiyars between a matrilateral and a patrilateral cousin. We have thus gone a little further in replying to the initial question: there is no absolute obligation to marry the father's sister's daughter, since the mother's brother's daughter is just as acceptable. However the question remains: is it necessary to marry a close relative?

When the Paraiyars are asked about this, their replies are often vague. 'We are obliged to marry a close relative, but if we like, we can also marry someone else.' This could hardly be more confused,

but some people insist, despite everything, that this type of marriage is absolutely obligatory, whereas others consider it to be completely optional. I was however able to discern some clearer elements behind these contradictory opinions. The Paraiyars are no great theoreticians, as we have already said, and it is always necessary to consider their replies according to the context.

First of all, it should be noted that the Paraiyars have few means of enforcing social sanctions. Their lack of unity prevents them from punishing those who deviate from the norm, and they are unable to inflict sanctions for marriages which are against tradition. Even inter-caste marriages do not lead to ostracism. The only possible sanction, in the case of an unorthodox marriage, is to break off family ties. This is a very frequent occurrence. To give an example:

> Arockyam had arranged a marriage for his sister's daughter. She eloped with a young man from the village and finally her parents accepted their marriage. Arockyam however never accepted it. For him, this marriage sanctioned the breaking off of ties with his family.

Arockyam thus considered the marriage he had prepared as being obligatory because he had given his sister to the other family, who thus had to give him a daughter in return. It thus appears clearly that it is the alliance between families which is at stake in Paraiyar marriages. In brief, it is not society which reprimands breaches of matrimonial obligations. However, such breaches result in cutting off existing ties. The role of the *tây-mâman* (the mother's eldest brother, or principal maternal uncle) is fundamental from this point of view. The Paraiyars insist on the fact that since he has given a daughter to a family, he thus has the right to *demand* a girl in return. Some even say that he can, if he so desires, convene a village council to enforce the decision, or that the parish priest can refuse to marry the girl to someone else. It is clear that a girl cannot get married without the *tây-mâman's* consent but, here again, a certain flexibility in the rules allows the possibility of finding a substitute *tây-mâman*. None the less, this rule is usually absolute. A father told us that he would give his daughter to his wife's brother's son since this brother had given him his sister, and now had a son of marriageable age. There is an obligation to give in return. It thus becomes evident that, generally speaking, if one wishes to remain on good terms with one's family, that is to say to maintain the alliance, it is necessary to give one's daughter to the mother's brother's daughter, unless the two

parties decide otherwise—which usually means that there is a quarrel in the offing. If one of the two parties wants the marriage to take place, this has to be the case; otherwise there is a risk of ties being cut off.

It seems to me, however, that in certain cases the obligation is clearer. Several people gave me the following argument:

> Sebastian, for example, told me that he took a wife from the village of Naivayal. In return, he gave a daughter to his wife's family in the same village. Now, he says, he is even, and he can marry his other daughters where he pleases.

Here we come back to the remarks we initially made in this section: marriage with a cross-cousin is an exchange which implies a relationship of reciprocity, i.e. giving and taking. In other words, there must be at least *one* exchange of marriages between the two families: a girl who is given has to be 'given back'. Once this 'repayment' has been made, the rule of reciprocity is respected. There is then no absolute obligation to make another alliance with the same family, and one can go somewhere else. This explains why patrilateral marriage hardly encourages the constitution of organic solidarity since it unites families two at a time, and only for a limited period of time. It then becomes possible to look to other families. Reciprocity is hence the rule: Valluvan, for example, fell in love with and married a girl from Manamadurai, a very far-off village which had no matrimonial relationships with Valghira Manickam. His first daughter was, quite logically, married into his wife's family which was thus 'paid back'. New ties thus have to be 'reciprocated'. In this respect, there are effectively certain circumstances where a man has the right to demand, or even kidnap, a girl: this is when a girl who is given has not been 'given back'. Cases are told of maternal uncles who demanded that their nieces come and live at their homes. The girls then came to their uncles' and were married to the uncles' sons after puberty. I have no knowledge of such cases in the current generation, but several adult women told me that they had been married in this way.

This clearly appears in the fact that a girl, who should normally be married to her maternal uncle's son, will have difficulty in finding a husband elsewhere. If the maternal uncle is not present at the negotiations, the family who has been contacted will become suspicious and will ask why the girl has not married her MBS. The other

family will then think that the girl has a major shortcoming or bad character and, in addition, the family will be afraid of incurring the maternal uncle's wrath. This difficulty is quite common and hence shows that the maternal uncle has rights over his sister's daughter.

In addition, it should be said that not only is there an obligation to give back in return, but there is also an obligation to receive. If I have taken a girl, I have to give another in return and my brother-in-law will be obliged to accept her. This is why it is incumbent on the *tây-mâman* to arrange his nieces' marriages. This is what a Christian told us when he said that his five-year-old son already had a wife at his sister's. He had to find a husband for this sister's daughter, i.e. give her his son. He said, 'It is obligatory—even if I were to refuse, they would still send the girl.' Refusing a girl means putting an end to a relationship of alliance. It is a serious decision which is only taken under exceptional circumstances.

This brief account brings out that there is indeed a sort of obligation to make preferential marriages. It is necessary, in any case, to ensure that reciprocity takes place, in other words, that a girl who is given is 'given back'. This therefore implies that any matrimonial relationship between two families requires an even number of marriages. However, this is not always the case in actual fact, since the children are not always available. But if it is the case, then one effectively observes that a girl who is given is 'given back'. It is clear once again that preferential marriage among the Paraiyars hardly encourages the harmony and cohesion of society, since everyone can more or less do as he pleases once reciprocity has been ensured. To sum up: one can say that there is an obligation to give a girl in return, once a girl has been taken. If this is not the case, it seems that the villagers can force the recalcitrants to conform to tradition. None the less, it is possible to think that they in fact have few means at their disposal to ensure that the rule is respected, and that the only possible 'sanction' is breaking off family ties. Added to this is the fact that a man who refuses to give his daughter to his wife's family will have difficulty in marrying her elsewhere. But, here again, the difficulty is not insuperable and it is possible to get round it.

4) The Multiplication of Alliances

Marriage with a cross-cousin can be explained as a repetition of previous alliances. A man reproduces the same marriage as his ancestors,

and the groups which are thus united have a tendency to remain allied. This type of marriage is to be found in South India, whereas in North India, on the contrary, repetitive marriages are prohibited (Karve 1953: 55). In other words, a man cannot contract a marriage similar to that of his father or grandfather. In North India, people are encouraged to find spouses among 'strangers' and thus multiply alliances. Louis Dumont has shown, however, that in North India repetition of marriages is encouraged in certain cases (1966b: 106). Reciprocally, it is possible to show here that South India is not completely hostile to the multiplication of alliances.

The last section showed that the repetition of an alliance is not always possible, nor even obligatory. If this is the case, this then also means that new alliances are sought for and that the Paraiyars have, in certain cases, the wish to create new ties. There are many conditions which are favourable to the extension of the network of alliances.

First of all, when a man does not have near relatives available for his son or daughter, he is clearly obliged to look further afield and thus create new ties. In addition, differences in age often prevent the marriage of cousins: a boy of twenty is not married to his cousin who is seven or eight years old and vice versa. This situation arises frequently. The father often says that he is obliged to look elsewhere in order to marry his daughter. In this case, the marriage takes place with the help and consent of the *tây-mâman*, who will take an active part in the negotiations. This is not the case if the father decides to look for a new alliance when the *tây-mâman* has a 'marriageable' child. This then provokes a breaking off of the alliance and the *tây-mâman* will not take part in the negotiations. Sometimes, the rupture is not complete and the *tây-mâman* will give his blessing to the marriage. This is the case when the cousins in question do not really want to marry each other. For example, the girl's father can be made an interesting proposal by a boy with a good job or a little land, or there is a proposal from a boy who agrees to come and live in his house (*vîdu mappilai*); if the *tây-mâman* is understanding and wishes to avoid trouble, he will give his agreement to the marriage, but there will be a chill between the two families since this marriage signifies that his son 'is not good enough for his niece'. He will also have the 'right' to be vexed and to refuse to be involved in the marriage.

In which case, there is a rupture between the two families. This occurs quite frequently.

The preferential marriage system is not, as such, totally opposed to the search for new alliances. This often takes place in large families. Here, what happens is that there is a marriage on the mother's side, a marriage on the father's side and, once these ties have been strengthened, the other children are married to 'strangers'. This situation is a perfect one for a father. It combines the possibility of creating new relationships while maintaining the old ones. In this way, a father will rarely give two daughters to the same family. If a man has two daughters, and his sister has two sons of the same age, nothing prohibits the marriage of the two sisters with the two brothers. In practise, however, this type of marriage is not common. It renders the principle of reciprocity problematical, since two girls have to be given back in return and, more importantly, the second marriage adds nothing to the first, since the alliance is already strong enough with the gift of one girl. It is much more preferable to look for a boy elsewhere, for example, on the mother's side, and the mother will insist on such a solution. There is only one case of such a marriage in the village where two Hindu brothers married two sisters. The first brother had married his MBD, and his *tây-mâman* (who became his father-in-law) had arranged the marriage. He also had to deal with the marriage of the younger brother, but he encountered some difficulty, because the young man was deaf, and so he ended up by giving him his second daughter. This is an extreme case, and some Paraiyars assert that it is not good to make two sisters live in the same house. The weakness of this point of view is demonstrated by the case just mentioned where the two sisters get on very well: in fact the truth is that the Paraiyars really prefer enlarging their circle of relatives when it is possible to do so. As a general rule, we can say that two preferential marriages (one on each side) per family are sufficient: in the majority of cases, the other marriages aim at extending ties. A father who has given a daughter to his sister's son will give his second daughter to his wife's brother's son, and will then look for a new relationship with a 'stranger'. In this way the family grows larger. It is not uncommon to hear a man say that the members of his wife's family have become relatives of his own family after their marriage. To illustrate this, the following account, which concerns a Hindu, is useful:

He has several daughters who are already married. His wife is from Kotakutti. The eldest daughter was thus given in return to this village, where she married her MBS. Reciprocity was thus respected. In order to reinforce his relationships with his family, he gave his second daughter to his sister's son who lives in S.R. Patnam. She is married to her FZS. Had he a son, he would have taken a girl from S.R. Patnam, but it did not turn out this way, and so he decided to give one of his daughters to his sister. Finally, the third daughter will be married to a stranger, since there are no other relatives available.

A word should now be said about a third reason which encourages the multiplication of alliances. The Paraiyars generally feel that children should not be married against their wishes. Many parents thus take into account their children's opinion when choosing a spouse. Such a thing, which is unthinkable among the high castes, is based on the Paraiyars' pragmatic character: they assert that marrying children against their wishes results in separation, and they often explain divorce as the result of a forced preferential marriage. They say, 'If we had taken into account the children's opinion, this would not have happened.' For example, a boy is known not to want to marry his paternal aunt's daughter. In other cases, people point out that premarital love affairs have ended up in divorce among young people who were married against their wishes. If a boy has 'someone in mind', people say, there is no point in making opposition. Such tolerance is not simply a matter of form. Children really do make opposition to proposed marriages, or propose a marriage themselves. But the most striking proof of this liberality appears in love marriages.

Love marriages are frequent among the Paraiyars. Parents often only make opposition with purely formal resistance or pretended anger. Finally, they have to give in to the valid reasons dictated by their children's hearts, even if, at the start of the marriage, things can be somewhat murky. After a certain time, the young newly-weds' situation becomes normal, and they soon become a couple like any other. Some claim that love marriages are more frequent today—'this is the modern world'—than in the past, but I have every reason to believe the contrary, and I have at my disposal numerous examples concerning the previous generation. Since children quickly become economically independent, their parents have little means of hindering the marriage of young people in love, and they know it very

well. Young people thus have the liberty to decide on their fate themselves.

> Selvi and Jesuraj are in love. This is hardly a secret: they have been in love for years and have sworn to be faithful. Nothing can prevent their getting married. Jesuraj, a young man who is hard-working and perseverant, looks after his mother and his sister since the death of his father. He has made his intentions known and has asked his *chitappa* (MZH), who lives in the house next door, to arrange the marriage. He has also written to his *tây-mâman*, who lives in Poona, with the same aim. None the less, the replies were unfavourable. The family is not on good terms with the girl's family. It is pointed out to Jesuraj that he should first of all get his sister married before thinking about his own marriage; it is claimed that the girl has a bad character (this seemed to me unjustified), etc. But all the while, people whisper that they expect them to disappear one fine day and return later and present everyone with the *fait accompli* of a consummated marriage. That was how things stood when I left. Unfortunately I never learnt the turn of events, but the likelihood is that the marriage took place.

This scenario is a typical one and is repeated over and over again. Sometimes it is elopement which prevents an arranged marriage. This was the case of Amalraj, who brought home Arockyai Mary whose maternal uncle had arranged a marriage with a member of his family. This union incurred the wrath of the girl's family and, of course, of the maternal uncle. After a few weeks, the young woman was reconciled with her parents, but this reconciliation was an insult to the maternal uncle with whom relationships were definitively cut off. The case of Valluvan is often cited to show the importance of mutual consent:

> When he was young, he was married to a relative, according to tradition. He then went to work in Manadmadurai as a mason and left his young wife behind. He met a young woman there with whom he fell in love. She soon had a child and Valluvan brought her back to the village where she has lived since with her six children. The first wife was abandoned and lives with her brother.

Basically nobody can oppose this kind of marriage because of the absence of authority. For example, the family of Valluvan's first wife evidently tried to ostracize him, but failed, and Valluvan has even become an important person in the village. It is true that there are so many couples resulting from love marriages that each family is

concerned by the issue. I have noted more than thirty cases, without having attempted to discover them systematically. Some love marriages are, in addition, disguised as arranged marriages; this is the case when the parents take their children's love in hand and arrange it according to the normal procedure.

It is striking to note that love marriages retain a somewhat shameful character, especially as far as the outside world is concerned, because the practice is heavily scorned in Brahmanic India. The villagers are afraid, for example, of saying that their neighbour has made a love marriage. They admit that 'It is not good to say that.' Some, as we have seen, disguise it according to arranged forms, and some Hindus told me, for example, that only the Christians practise this type of marriage which they themselves find repugnant. Love marriages, while being perfectly tolerated, are none the less not socially prestigious. They are what Dumont calls 'secondary marriages' (1961: 13-18).

Dumont notes that all castes distinguish between 'primary', or principal, marriages and 'secondary' marriages which are subsidiary to the first kind. Secondary marriages may be legitimate or illegitimate, but they are at any rate less prestigious. It then appears that, in many cases, it is only the eldest son who has to contract a primary marriage, with all the usual expenditure, whereas the younger sons can content themselves with secondary marriages. In Dumont's opinion, preferential marriage in Tamil Nadu is only necessary for one of the family's sons (1975b: 26). One might think that love marriages among the Paraiyars are a kind of secondary marriage. We have seen that parents aim at establishing two preferential marriages, after which they prefer creating new ties. Love marriages often require no ceremonies whatever. The lovers elope or live together at one of their parents' for a few days and their union is thus sanctioned. The Christians will say that they will organize a religious marriage 'after the rainy season' or 'after the religious festival' ... i.e. never. Many of these unions are thus never sanctioned by a ceremony. The couples which result from love marriages none the less have the same status as other couples, and their children are just as legitimate as any other children. Some Paraiyars even go so far as to point out that, after all, this type of marriage costs them little and this does not displease them. They comment, 'If they are happy like that ...'. They also conclude that they cannot go against their children's love.

Young people are in favour of love marriages; many have a romance with a girl and some go so far as to swear faithfulness. By this stage—and this can happen quite young—the whole village knows about it; such was the case of Taïnis and Vedamanickam. The parents are then presented with a *fait accompli*. If the parents decide to look for another partner, they will encounter much difficulty since the news of the lovers' oath will have rapidly gone round the other villages. A man will not want to give his daughter to a boy who has already sworn faithfulness to another girl. Such a marriage would be doomed to failure; it is thus very hard to marry young people who have decided otherwise. Not all young people want love marriages. If a young man 'has no one in mind', he will rely on his parents, all the more so since a love marriage can create problems. A love marriage implies that a boy absolutely wanted to marry a given girl. Hence there is no use in complaining later on if her behaviour is 'bad'. On the other hand, if the marriage is an arranged one, the two families feel themselves responsible for the marriage and attempt to sort out any problems. This is so true that I was told that it is better for a young caste-Hindu not to see his wife before the marriage. In this way he cannot be reproached with having wanted this particular woman. This was the argument used by the family of a Vishwakarma girl: her husband wanted to repudiate her for adultery. The girl's family maintained at the caste council that he did not have the right to do so because he had clearly admitted to wanting to marry the girl before the marriage, and so had no reason to complain afterwards. Among the Paraiyars, things take place in the same kind of way. A boy who marries for love has to assume his responsibilities.

This tolerance of love marriages is quite remarkable in India. Among the high castes, the practice is greatly scorned, whereas it is a common occurrence among the lower castes (see Aurora 1972: 152; Doshi 1971: 124). Here again there is a clear difference between the great and the small tradition. Among the high castes, marriage is a matter wholly devoted to improving one's status and can therefore not be left to 'the capricious judgement of young people' (Tyler 1973: 131). The Paraiyars are not very concerned about improving their status by marriage which is, for them, a simple means of making alliances, whereas the question of status may have an obsessive quality for the high-caste Hindus (see, for example, Pocock 1972: 66).

Love marriages are essentially isogamous since they result from the free choice of each partner.

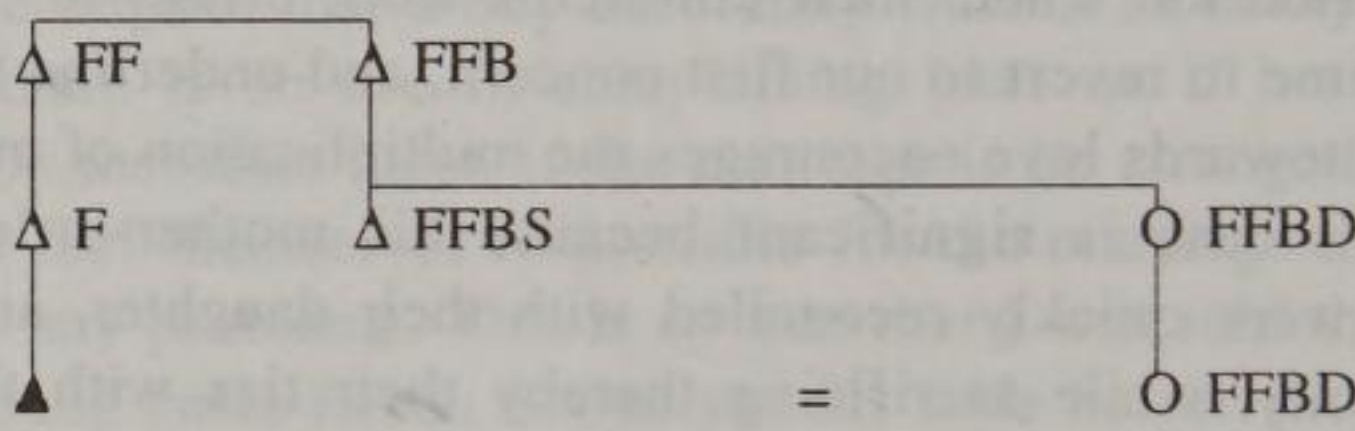
Finally, love marriages reveal themselves as adapting very well to the rule of marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin. The rule prevents the creation of unilateral relationships between the exchanging parties. In consequence, it encourages isogamy which, as we have just seen, is a necessary condition for love marriages. In the same fashion, a society like that of the Paraiyars, which has very little hierarchy, has difficulty in forbidding or even hindering young people's romantic inclinations. In the case quoted above, Selvi and Jesuraj are both excellent brick-makers who are able to make as good a living as any adult; on the contrary, it is the parents who are afraid of losing the essential contribution which their children's work brings in.

It is now time to revert to our first concern, and underline the fact that liberality towards love encourages the multiplication of marriage ties. Amalraj's case is significant because his mother-in-law and father-in-law were quickly reconciled with their daughter, and with Amalraj's family, while sacrificing thereby their ties with the *tây-mâman*. There are other institutions which encourage the multiplication of alliances. For example, a widower can marry a new wife taken from a family of 'strangers', and widows also have the right to remarry as they wish. Finally, if a couple has too many problems, separations are accepted, and the partners have freedom to choose a spouse without taking into account the preferential marriage. The children of such marriages are perfectly legitimate and the couple is regarded in the same way as a normal couple.

These brief indications show that the Paraiyars are not averse to extending their network of alliances outside the usual circle of relatives. On the contrary, these marriages with strangers are often encouraged, even if there is fear of venturing out into the unknown. Some remarks are however necessary to understand correctly the limits of this encouragement towards expanding alliances. In the first place, we shall see in the following sections that many people are afraid of launching themselves into such a venture and so take many precautions. Firstly, we have seen that such marriages are, in the main, secondary marriages whereas the rule of marriage concerns principal marriages, which are the most acceptable. Secondly, and more importantly, the Paraiyars do not venture far. The new alliances always take place within the usual marriage circle and we have

already noted that all members of this circle are relatives. It is thus always possible to find a kinship tie in such a marriage. Thus, a Paraiyar will never say that he is marrying a stranger, but will speak rather of a 'distant relative' (*anyan*, or relative whom he does not know). For example, a man will say, 'We are both Paraiyars, but I do not know in what way my wife is a relative, she is an *anyan*.' Given the multitude of preferential alliances and the narrowness of the marriage circle, there is always a kinship relation between the spouses. This is the case, for example, of Arockyam who is a relative of his wife in the following way:

Diagram 7: Relationship between Arockyam[5] his wife



It emerges that this marriage, which initially was not a preferential one, conforms to the rule of preferential marriage. FFBD is a sister to Arockyam's father. She is therefore Arockyam's *attai* and her daughter is thus *attai magal* or FFBDD = FZD. She is therefore a preferential spouse even if the marriage was not arranged with this aim; it is almost a preferential marriage by accident. The reason for this is the extreme complexity of kinship relations within the Paraiyars' marriage circle. Everybody, or almost everybody, is related, and many are related on both sides, as we have shown above.

Today, however, there is a certain tendency to look for spouses outside the traditional circle, and this constitutes an additional encouragement of the multiplication of alliances. There is no absolute barrier to marriage with Paraiyars anywhere in Tamil Nadu. However, attempts to do so are so infrequent that I would hesitate to call it a real tendency. Let us simply say that the possibility of 'marrying afar' exists and goes in the direction of enlarging kinship relations.

[5]This is not the same Arockyam as the one mentioned in Diagram 6.

The story of a marriage: love or preference

At the end of my stay in the village, Valghira Manickam was rocked by a love story which ended in a marriage. It was not, however, a typical love marriage since numerous questions remain unanswered, as far as the true intentions of the participants are concerned. In addition, it is not without interest to note that it was, what could be jokingly called a 'preferential love marriage', since the girl was the boy's *attai magal* and thus his preferential spouse. In fact, it sometimes happens that two cousins elope and get married against the wishes of their parents. It might be, as Homans and Schneider have noted, because of the great intimacy which is established between a boy and his maternal uncle's daughter. This is quite possible, but it does not apply to the case of Shanti and Selvaraj, which we shall look at now.

Selvaraj's father lived at the reservoir, that is to say a little outside the village. He had three sisters at the village who were married. One of his sisters had a girl 18 years of age. At her first menstruation, Selvaraj's father, who was thus the *tây-mâman,* came to conduct the ceremony. It had been agreed that Selvaraj would marry this girl, called Shanti, when they attained the required age. But relationships between the families degenerated and quarrels became frequent, to the extent that, when Selvaraj's brother died of tuberculosis, the three sisters did not attend the funeral. This was considered an insult and the rupture became complete.

Once the children had reached the right age, the parents started negotiations to find spouses. It would seem that this did not prove a success for either of them. Speculation as to the reasons for this ran rife. Some claimed that many were wary because it was known that each of them had an available preferential partner and, it was said, that people were afraid, in a case like this, to start negotiations and incur the hostility of the other party. To give an example: Selvaraj's father took no part in the search made by Shanti's family though he was the *tây-mâman*. In short, people were distrustful. Others stressed the fact that Selvaraj and Shanti did not have a good reputation. Selvaraj had had several girlfriends, about whom everybody knew, and people said that Shanti had also had affairs with several boys from the village and, more recently, with a boy from Devakottai whom the young people had apparently pelted with stones, and

chased from the village. Even Selvaraj knew about these affairs and he himself called Shanti a 'prostitute'.

One fine day, Selvaraj turned up at his *attai's* (his father's sister), with whom he was not normally on speaking terms, and asserted that he wanted to marry his cousin, which was in fact his right. The girl's parents did not agree—at least so they claimed. They reproached Selvaraj for having encouraged his father to look for a wife and to have come to see them solely because they had been unable to find one. But it came to light that Selvaraj was in love with his cousin, who reciprocated the feeling, and was also desirous of accepting him. In the meanwhile, Selvaraj's father, having learnt of this, went and 'violently' beat his son. Having been publicly humiliated, Selvaraj went off to the sanctuary to swear that he would never set foot in his family's house again.

Shanti's family 'seeing that Selvaraj had suffered because of their girl', decided that his intentions were honourable and invited him to come and live with them. This he hastened to do. At this point in time things were in a deadlock. What was to be done? A go-between tried in vain to persuade Selvaraj's father to accept the marriage. A solution was then found: one night, just as everybody suspected or even expected, Selvaraj and Shanti eloped. According to them, they went as far as Velankanni to be blessed there by a priest, claiming that they were ill. This blessing was considered by them to be the equivalent of a marriage, and they then went back to the village. However, nobody had seen them leave or return, and some whispered that they had not left at all but had simply lain low in their hut. Anyway, they were now married. Selvaraj claimed that they would organize a real wedding at the parish after the rainy season, but nobody really believed them. He probably did nothing of the sort. A month later, the young couple left for Madras for the brick-making season. Their stay was, however, curtailed because Shanti was pregnant, and she returned to the village for her confinement.

This incident has a number of aspects which still remain unclear. We have seen that it is difficult to explain why the parents were unable to find spouses for their children after several years of searching. The second problem is Selvaraj's *volte-face*. Why did he suddenly change his mind? For his family and a few of the villagers, there is no doubt about the matter: Shanti's family, to get even because of the negotiations, apparently cast a black-magic spell on Sel-

varaj which made him end up by finally falling in love with Shanti. Her parents believed that Selvaraj had planned the whole thing: having seen that he had little hope of finding a wife, he had thought about his cousin, an only daughter, whom he could marry and become *vîdumappilai* (uxorilocal spouse). He would thus inherit the property, house and goods of his father-in-law which would have been a profitable deal for him. This solution is not without a certain common sense. It can also be combined with a third solution which maintains that Selvaraj fell in love with Shanti, which is possible since the girl was very pretty. Many thought that he even made the girl pregnant and this would explain why not a lot was seen of her between the beginning of the incident and his marriage. This solution is also possible.

Whatever the case may be, this is how the story of these two young people ended. Although not a typical case, it has allowed us to go a little more deeply into the life of the village with its passions and rumours.

5) Endogamy

It is now time to revert to more prosaic considerations, and analyse the units within which and outside of which a marriage has to take place. As we already know, the Paraiyars constitute an endogamous caste, and the inhabitants of the village believe that they can marry any Paraiyar even if this does not occur frequently. Before examining the nature of this endogamy, it will be useful to say something about inter-caste marriages.

Such marriages are uncommon and are not highly thought of. Even hypergamous marriages (*anuloma*), which are perfectly accepted in India (Tambiah 1973: 67), are not sought after here and certainly carry with them no additional status. On the contrary, it is the partner who is brought down to the level of the Paraiyars. It is true that marriage here, as we have seen, is not entirely devoted to improving status, as is the case in North India (Van der Veen 1972: 108). At Valghira Manickam, marriage is a means of finding allies and of enlarging the family circle; everything takes place among equals, among people with the same status. This is why the Paraiyars do not believe very much in the value of inter-caste marriages. According to them, 'One of the partners will always consider himself superior', and the marriage will be doomed to failure. However, the absence

of authority prevents sanctions against people who break the caste law of endogamy. There are therefore cases of inter-caste marriages in the village; the husbands have become members of the village, and the children are Paraiyars who are indistinguishable from the other villagers. They marry within the caste as the others do.

There are two well-known cases of inter-caste marriage in the village. Twenty years ago, Sebastianamman married a Vellalar mason who had no family. They fell in love and came to live in the village. They had a son who is married to a Paraiyar girl. The second case is more recent: a mason, from the Agamudayar caste, met Sowrymuttu and they became friends. Sowrymuttu had a daughter who had not yet attained puberty. He gave her to his friend though he was a Hindu. The Hindu then converted and took the name of Jacob. The couple have several children and also live in the village. The first case, one of love between two young people, is banal; the second is stranger, but I was unable to obtain more information about it.

Finally, young people (especially Hindus) who go and work in the big towns often meet girls with whom they live and have children. Only one of these girls, from the Naicker caste, lives in the village. I believe that most of the villagers know nothing of this young woman's caste. They consider her to be a village woman.

Endogamy is further restricted to the religious community, since there is no exchange in marriage between Christians and Hindus. Even with this restriction, Paraiyar endogamy is more limited still, since in actual fact, people do not marry much outside the usual circle. None the less this absolute endogamy is a reality since, in theory, one can marry a Paraiyar from any area, and isolated cases prove that this is true. It is possible to speak of absolute endogamy because it is subject to a specific rule: a Paraiyar has to marry a Paraiyar. Even when a man says that he will agree to marry his daughter to anybody, what he in fact means is, 'to any Paraiyar'. On the other hand there is a geographic area of endogamy outside of which people do not marry much, that is to say, virtually not at all. This area is made up of kinship villages. There is no rule which determines the number of these villages. It is rather tradition, linked with the fear of the unknown, in the sense in which we have encountered it, and the preference for marriage with cousins which drive the Paraiyars to marry within this circle.

Table 11: Places of birth and destination of Christian women and girls from Valghira Manickam (%)

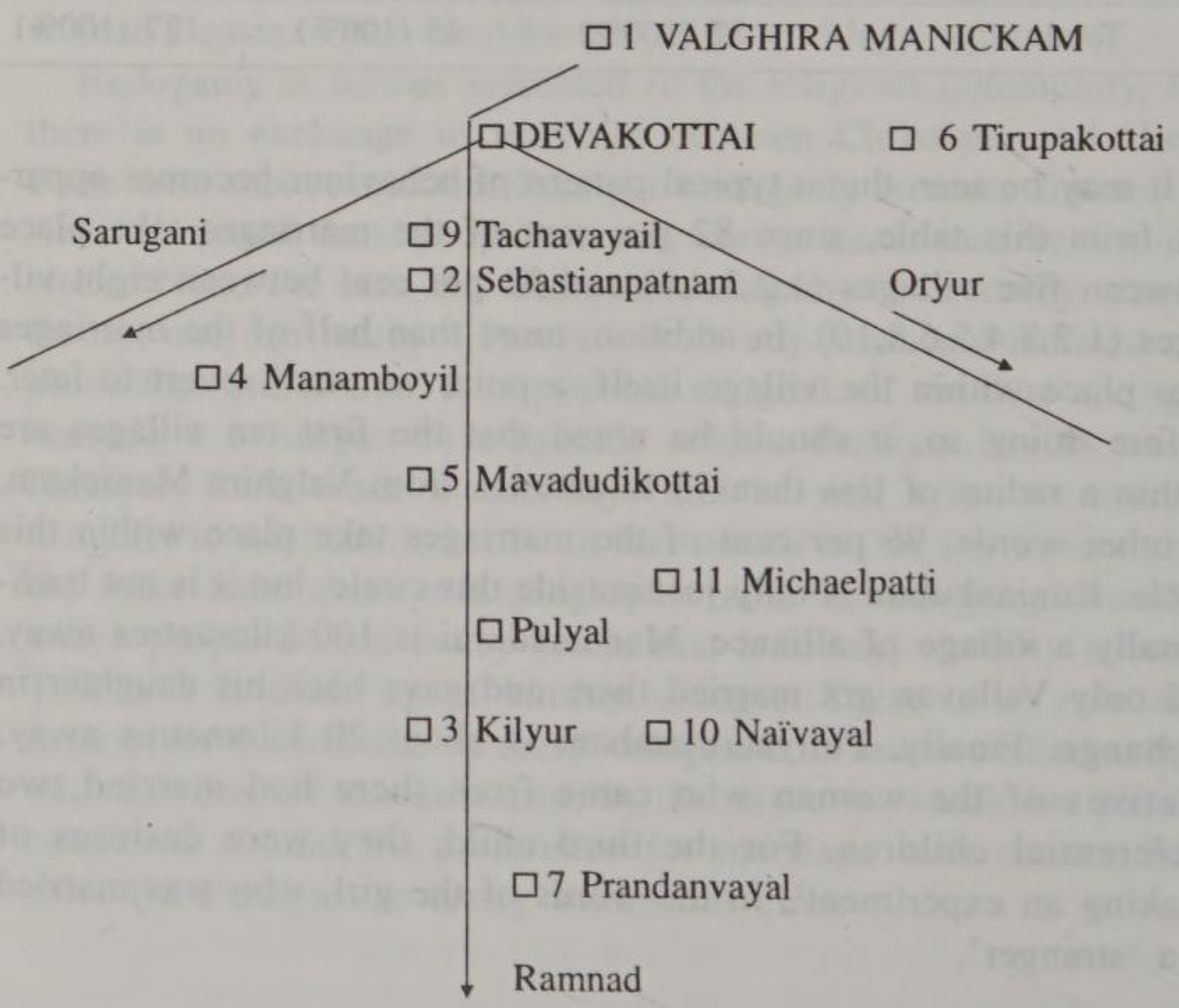
		Women's place of birth	Girl's place of destination	Total
1)	Valghira Manickam	44 (53.6%)	21 (46.6%)	65 (51.1%)
2)	Sebastianpatnam	9 (10.9%)	8 (17.7%)	17 (13.3%)
3)	Kilyur	9 (10.9%)	2 (4.4%)	11 (8.6%)
4)	Manamboyl	4 (4.8%)	1 (2.2%)	5 (3.9%)
5)	Mavidudikottai	3 (3.6%)	1 (2.2%)	4 (3.1%)
6)	Tirupakottai	3 (3.6%)	3 (6.6%)	6 (4.7%)
7)	Pranndanvayal	2 (2.4%)	1 (2.2%)	3 (2.3%)
8)	Kalayanandal	2 (2.4%)	2 (4.4%)	4 (3.1%)
9)	Tachavayal	1 (1.2%)	1 (2.2%)	2 (1.5%)
10)	Naivayal	1 (1.2%)	3 (6.2%)	4 (3.1%)
11)	Michaelpatti	1 (1.2%)	– (–%)	1 (0.7%)
12)	Kunjankulam	1 (1.2%)	1 (2.2%)	2 (1.5%)
13)	Puliyadithambam	1 (1.2%)	– (–%)	1 (0.7%)
14)	Manamadurai	1 (1.2%)	1 (2.2%)	2 (1.5%)
Total		82 (100%)	45 (100%)	127 (100%)

It may be seen that a typical pattern of behaviour becomes apparent from this table, since 82 per cent of the marriages take place between five villages (1,2,3,4,6) and 91 per cent between eight villages (1,2,3,4,5,6,8,10). In addition, more than half of the marriages take place within the village itself, a point we shall revert to later. Before doing so, it should be noted that the first ten villages are within a radius of less than 15 kilometres from Valghira Manickam. In other words, 96 per cent of the marriages take place within this circle. Kunjankulam is only just outside this circle, but it is not traditionally a village of alliance. Manamadurai is 100 kilometres away, and only Valluvan got married there and gave back his daughter in exchange. Finally, Puliyadithambam is about 20 kilometres away; relatives of the woman who came from there had married two preferential children. For the third child, they were desirous of 'making an experiment', in the words of the girl, who was married to a 'stranger'.

It thus becomes clear that there is *a de facto* endogamy which, however, is not made obligatory by a rule. There is a group of villages with which women are traditionally exchanged.

It is striking to note that all these villages are situated south of Devakottai and are grouped together in two parishes: Devakottai and Pulyal. It could be said that Christian Paraiyars are not to be found everywhere; yes, there are relatively few villages containing Christian Paraiyars, but this does not provide us with an explanation for the limited number of contacts. The opposite could just as well be the case: if the community is limited in number, its members could very well get used to looking further afield for partners. This, however, is not the case at all. This social introversion seems to me to be in conformity with the rule of marriage which implies a tendency to repeat alliances and engage in limited exchanges: alliances are almost always made within the traditional circle of villages. Christian Paraiyars rarely venture further outside; marriages outside the circle are almost exceptions. The Christians appear, once again, as not

Plan 2: Location of villages having affinal relations with Valghira Manickam



having contacts with the outside and the rest of the caste. People marry Nesavu Kara Paraiyars because they know no one else. A caste which wants to acquire political importance starts by breaking down the barriers of endogamy within itself, and encourages exchanges with distant members in order to reinforce the unity of the caste. This is what the Izhavas and the Nadars did at the beginning of the century.

Unlike the Christians, the Hindu Paraiyars have a greater tendency to multiply alliances. This state of affairs was already apparent in Table 10, which showed that the Hindu Paraiyars are much less inclined to renew existing marriage alliances. Table 12 confirms the extension of the network of alliances among the Hindus.

Table 12: Places of birth and destination of Hindu women and girls fom Valghira Manickam (%)

	Women's place of birth	Girl's place of destination	Total
Valghira Manickam	7 (22.5%)	2 (11.7%)	9 (18.7%)
Kanda Devi	2 (6.4%)	–	2 (4.1%)
Vangaloor	2 (6.4%)	–	2 (4.1%)
Kotakutti	2 (6.4%)	–	2 (4.1%)
Eroseri	2 (6.4%)	–	2 (4.1%)
Oonjanai	1 (3.2%)	2 (11.7%)	3 (6.2%)
Divers	15 villages/ one woman each (48.3%)	13 villages/one woman each (76.4%)	28 (58.3%)
Total	31 (100%)	17 (100%)	48 (100%)

Among the Hindus, almost 60 per cent of the marriages take place in a village where no girl has been given or taken beforehand. These villages are often quite far from Valghira Manickam, i.e. about 20 kilometres away. In the last chapter, we saw that the Hindu Paraiyars were more militant and more involved in the movements which defend the rights of the untouchables, and from which the Christians are excluded. The Hindus' better integration is confirmed here by matrimonial practices. Not only are they less attached to preferential marriage, but they also have a tendency to look for spouses further afield and diversify their alliances.

The Christians' social introspection becomes even clearer, if one takes into account the fact that the majority of their marriages take place within the village itself, which is not the case with the Hindus who are, in fact, at a disadvantage because of their being fewer in number. The Christians have, however, an ambivalent attitude as concerns village endogamy. Many claim that they prefer to marry outside, but continue to do so within the village. Young people who do not have a girlfriend within the village unanimously want to marry elsewhere, because they 'know the character of the girls in this village' and so prefer girls they do not know. A boy does not want to marry a girl who has had a relationship with a friend of his, or a girl with whom another boy is in love. It is not a good thing either to marry a girl who is teased by other boys. Figures show, however, that people continue to marry girls from the village and this is the case of almost all the love marriages. A preferential spouse does not necessarily live in the village. If the father's sister got married in another village, FZD will thus originate from this village.

The main argument which is used against getting married within the village is the fact that the girl has a tendency to go back to her parents' at the slightest quarrel. When a girl gets married in another village, she has to adapt and will hesitate before going back to her parents'. This argument seems to me unsatisfactory, and is not borne out by the facts. I did not observe continual coming and going in internal marriages. On the other hand, when a girl who got married in another village comes back to her own village, matters are much more serious. I am still surprised by the Paraiyars' assertions since what they do in practice constantly undermines what they say. For example, a young man, happily married in the village, told me that he wanted to get his brother to marry outside the village since, in the village, there were a lot of problems with the in-laws. He added, however, that this was not the case with him.

It is true that a girl who has a bad reputation in the village will have difficulty in finding a husband there, and will have to look outside. I was also provided with an interesting case where marriage outside the village is better: a classificatory sister and brother cannot normally marry each other. This does take place, however, as we have seen, because of the bilateral nature of kinship relations. The act is more acceptable, however, for young people from different villages, since they do not know each other and do not address each

other by kinship terms. On the other hand, within the village, such young people call each other 'brother' and 'sister' as soon as they can talk, and so it is difficult for them to marry each other. This strikes me as being a good example, because of the fact that kinship is more social than biological. In Europe, the prohibition of incest also concerns adoptive brothers and sisters, since they are considered to be brothers and sisters, although their relationship is in no way a biological one. The same is true in the village: two young people who call each other 'brother' and 'sister' will end up by considering themselves to be so, even if they are distant relatives. Exactly the same relationship can, on the other hand, be ignored if they live in different villages, and do not know each other, even if the biological distance is the same in the two cases.

Finally, we may remark again that the Christians seem to conform to the South Indian rule of marrying in one's own village, while in North India this practice is forbidden.

6) Exogamy

We may now examine the units which exchange women among the Paraiyars. We may say that, generally speaking, there is no named exogamous unit. It is kinship vocabulary which delimits the people one cannot marry, i.e. brothers and sisters. The absence of defined units allows greater flexibility since certain relationships can be forgotten, or at least ignored, as we have just seen. As a general rule, we may say that a man cannot marry the women he calls 'sister', that is to say: FBD, MZD, FFBDD, MMZDD, etc. The rule of the four *gotras* or the *sapinda* rule which is frequently encountered in North India and which forbids the repetition of marriages with the parents' families is not applicable here since, on the contrary, the repetition of marriage is encouraged.

The Hindu Paraiyars claim to have exogamous *kulams*, a term which could be translated as 'lineage'. These *kulams* are, however, somewhat institutionalized. A *kulam* comprises the brothers of the same family who meet for family ceremonies. There are, however, no particular practices which are specific to these *kulams*; relatives and neighbouring friends also take part in the same ceremonies. In addition, these *kulams* do not have a name, despite the fact that named exogamous units are encountered in the region. All the Udayars belong to one of the four exogamous patrilinear *karanis*. All the members of a *karani* are blood brothers and have to find a wife

in another *karani*, no matter which. The four *karanis* are: Chithuran, Kotturan, Naithianni and Ambattan. The sole function of the *karanis* is the one just mentioned, but they are found in all the Udayar villages. The Pallars of Pani Pulan Vayal are divided into exogamous matrilinear units. In other words, a man belongs to his mother's *karei*. There are a very great number of *kareis* (Valam, Sengan, Velanga, Karuttan, Mayalangi, etc.). The Pallars have a system of double filiation since one belongs to one's mother's *karei*, but one inherits from one's father. Matrilinearity concerns the choice of a wife but goes further, since the members of the same *karei* consider each other brothers. They have to be present at ceremonies, and Sevugan explains the importance which the group can have:

> If I go to a Pallar village which I do not know, people will ask me to which *karei* I belong. I will reply that I belong to the Karuppan *karei* and if there are families from my *karei* in this village, they will take me to these people, so that I can be received as a relative. On the other hand, if there are none, they will ask me where I married my wife, my daughter, my sister or my son, and there will always be a way to find an allied family who will agree to receive me.

The *kareis* were invented because people used to marry anybody, even their sisters. With the *kareis*, such practices are no longer possible. It becomes clear that the *kareis* extend over a reasonably large territory and encourage better integration among the Pallars. There is nothing of the kind among the Christians, who only know a limited number of relatives, i.e. those with whom they can establish a genealogical link.

There are, none the less, exogamous units among the Christians. However, they are neither official nor definitive and, in addition, they do not constitute maximal exogamous units: that is to say, there are brothers and sisters who do not belong to these units, which have a purely local nature. These units are called *vakaiyaras*.

The *vakaiyaras* may be compared to family names. However they are neither official nor lasting. We have seen that the villagers do not seek to be original in the choice of names: the Arockyams and Sebastians are numerous. As one man explains: the *vakaiyara* is a name which is applied to the members of a family and which is added to the personal name. In fact, it would be better to speak of a nickname rather than a name since, like nicknames, the *vakaiyara* is attributed by the villagers because of a quality or failing of a mem-

ber of the family. In other words, the *vakaiyara* is purely local; the *vakaiyaras* of Valghira Manickam are found nowhere else.

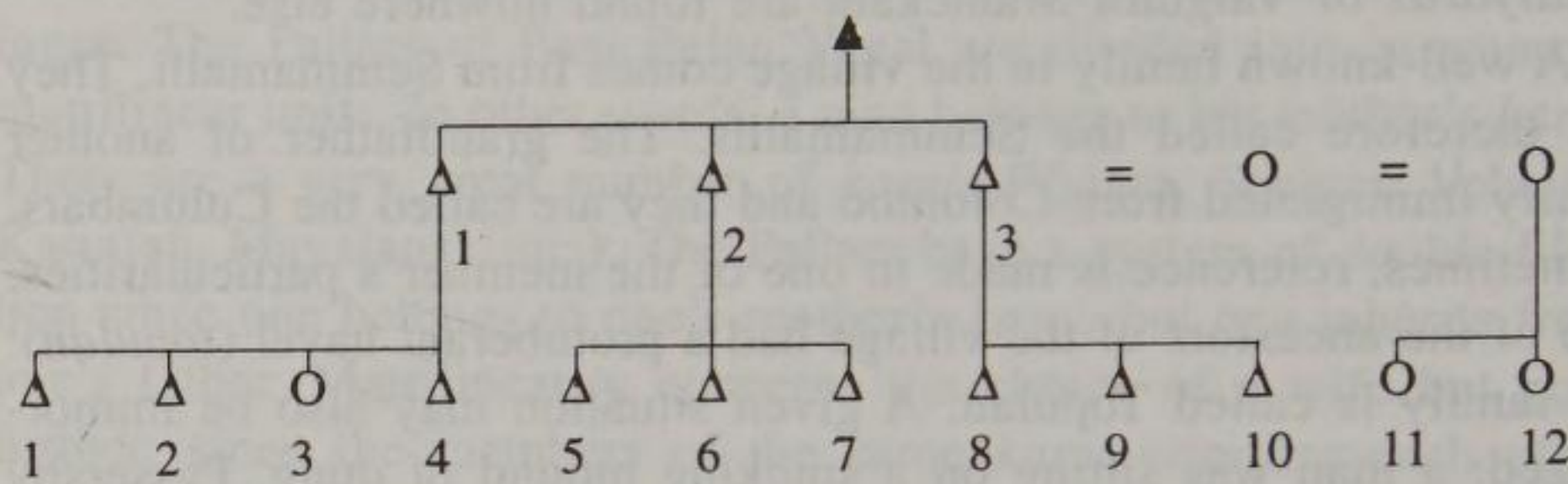
A well-known family in the village comes from Semmamalli. They are therefore called the Semmamallis. The grandfather of another family immigrated from Colombo and they are called the Culumbars. Sometimes, reference is made to one of the member's particularities: one of the ancestors of the village had a protuberant navel (*topulan*): his family is called Topulan. A given situation may also be immortalized: a man was sitting on a smoking mound of dung. Passersby made fun of him and said that his behind was on fire. Since then his family have been called *Samba-kundiam* (behinds of fire). Another man was known as a jobber (*makkan*) and this became the name of his descendants.

As may be seen, the *vakaiyaras* resemble nicknames. They can change, and new ones are constantly created. The catechist's family (*Koyil Pillai*) bears the name of his office. The catechist's younger brother, for example, is called Koyil Pillai Thambi. A new family quickly receives a new name. This name is not guaranteed by an official decision, but by usage. People will say: that man is the brother of the man with 'the behind on fire' and so little by little the term is accepted. However, the use of *vakaiyaras* is very limited. Many villagers do not know the name of certain groups, other groups have several names, etc. There is nothing official about this.

None the less, the *vakaiyara* designates groups of families which are sometimes very extensive in the village. If, for example, one takes the fathers of people still alive, it is possible to trace descendants down to many households in the village. This is the case of Yagappan's descendants, as is shown in Diagram 8.

The figures show that in the third generation, Yagappan's descendants were divided into twelve couples. Other families in the village are just as large, and by selecting a few ancestors, it is probably possible to find a kinship relation between the majority of the families in the village less than three degrees removed. The male descendants represented in Diagram 8 constitute a *vakaiyara*. Their children are all brothers and sisters and cannot marry each other. They form an exogamous unit. However, the importance of the group does not go much further. It is in no way a 'corporate group' capable of active solidarity, far from it, in fact.

Diagram 8: Yagappan's descendants



Lines of descendants are hence little structured and, as we shall see shortly, not very unified. They constitute the basic exogamous unit, but their importance stops there. They can rarely offer a united front, even if a few of the members get on well together and can, if required, join together for action.

7) Arrangements for Marriage

Till now, we have mostly looked at whom one can and cannot marry. It will be useful now to see what the procedures are that must be undertaken to prepare for a marriage.

Even when the marriage is a preferential one, it is necessary for the matter to be concluded according to a minimum number of rules. Among the Paraiyars, there is little which requires a great deal of formality, but when people venture out into marriage with a stranger, no precautions are great. We shall see here what is the procedure which a young man's father has to follow in order to find a wife for his son. It is possible that the matter has already been concluded a long time back. But if this is not the case, then things are a little more complicated.

7.1) Marriageable age: It used to be the case that the Paraiyars married quite young. Girls became nubile a little after puberty and the same was true of boys. We have even seen that a little girl could be brought into a family at around ten years of age, and be married to the son of the family after puberty. Generally speaking, the Paraiyars did not practise child marriage, as was the custom among the high castes. Until recently, it was not uncommon to see a couple get married at around 15 or 17 years of age.

Today, among Christians the age of marriage has been considerably increased, since the priest requires that girls be 18 years old

and the boys 21 years old. Nevertheless, I think that the age of marriage has been increased independently of the parish priest's rules, since the Hindus as well tend to marry later on.

People usually expect the boy to be older than the girl. This, however, is not a compulsory criterion. In the first place, most Paraiyars do not know what their age is: if the fiancés come from the same village, the parents are more or less capable of saying which of the two was born first, but if not, an estimate has to be made. The matter is not of great importance, and there are marriages where the wife is older. However the difference in age should not be too great. If a preferential marriage *has* to take place then a slight difference in age is easily accepted. The husband can be older than his wife; as a Hindu woman once told us, 'If you saw my husband, you would think he was my father.' Widowers can thus marry young girls, but usually people prefer, as in Europe, that the age difference should not be too pronounced.

Generally speaking, it is necessary for a couple to be able to provide for their own needs and thus be economically independent. For coolies and brick-makers this is the case after the age of 16 or 17. It used to be one of the criteria for allowing people to marry. Nowadays, the age at which intellectuals marry is considerably more advanced because, as we have seen, they do not generally have jobs which allow them to support a family.

7.2) The negotiations: When these conditions are fulfilled, the boy's father starts to look for a girl. The girl's father cannot himself undertake these steps. This would imply that he is anxious to get rid of her because of some hidden problem. Thus, it is even said that when the boy's family come for their first visits, the girl's father must not feed his guests too well, since they might be intrigued by this and ask themselves why he is trying to pull the wool over their eyes. A simple meal is hence sufficient.

The ceremony of the first menstruation (*manjal nirattu vella*) makes things public: the interested parties now know that the girl is ready to be married. The girl's family has to wait for propositions to be made by the interested parties. The friends and relatives can tell the boy's family that the girl is kind, hard-working, etc., but no official steps will be taken. Before a boy's father takes official steps, it is necessary that he has no more pubescent daughters to marry, since it is the daughters of the family who have to be married first.

Boys are married afterwards. Generally speaking, parents are more worried about a girl's marriage than a boy's marriage. The boy will remain in the village, while a girl leaves for another family. In addition, a girl's marriage costs money and a brother has to give priority to his sisters. If the father has died, it is the elder brother and the *tây-mâman* who have to arrange the marriage.

The *tây-mâman* is responsible for a girl's marriage. According to the rule, he should even take her and marry her to his son. When this is not possible, he none the less has to make sure that she makes a good marriage. A marriage arranged in this way is a matter which ties two families together. It is the family who act as guarantors for the couple's marriage, and it is with another family that they have an intention of making an alliance. An intermediary—a relative or a friend—often serves as a go-between for the two families and recommends one family to the other. A girl has to be given to a family with whom it is possible to get on. It is out of the question to arrange a marriage if there is a quarrel between the two families. After the marriage, the families of the two spouses become relatives, and therefore have certain mutual obligations to perform.

It is true, of course, that the family is not the only criterion for arranging a marriage. The partners' character also has to be accounted for. It is expected that the boy should be hard-working, kind, i.e. that he will not beat his wife too much, and will be able to feed his family. The girl has to be hard-working, be able to master agricultural skills and brick-making, she has to be discreet if not submissive; for some, beauty is important, but not for all. Many young men are afraid that a woman who is too good-looking will soon prove unfaithful. Weight is an important sign of beauty: a fat girl will be preferred to a girl who is too thin. Young men who are very ugly will have difficulty in finding a wife, but this is obviously uncommon. The economic criterion is, anyway, the most important one for concluding a good marriage.

However, it would be wrong to imagine that marriages aim at improving the status of one of the parties. We have seen that marriage is isogamous. A good husband has to be able to feed his family every day, but nobody expects much more of the marriage. Young people who have good salaried jobs, or who have some property, require a dowry and it is out of the question for poor parents to hope to be able to marry their child to someone who is markedly richer. Among

the Paraiyars who belong to the marriage circle, there is almost no one who clearly stands out higher.

None the less, a marriage, and the negotiations which take place beforehand, are not considered small matters. The parents are afraid of making a bad marriage and all possible precautions are taken. When an interesting party is pointed out by someone close to the family, the boy's father, accompanied by another relative (but not the boy) goes to the village. The first visit aims at establishing contacts. If the prospect seems interesting, they will return. The girl's father briefly describes her qualities and the girl makes a timid appearance. They take the opportunity to question some villagers: is the girl 'pure'? Does she not have some secret illness? Does she have a good character? Sometimes, one of the parties can be 'diverted' towards another family: the person questioned will say that the girl is really not recommendable, but that, on the other hand, he knows another girl, from another family ...

A number of visits are necessary before a decision can be taken. The boy can go with his parents at a subsequent visit, in order to see the girl and be seen by her. The girl's family also make inquiries: is the boy hard-working? Can he make a lot of bricks per day? Is he reliable? Is he not violent? Is the prospective mother-in-law not too harsh? Parents do not like sending their daughter out into the unknown. As we have seen, they take on the responsibility for the marriage and thus have to be very careful.

The boy's family visits several families in this way, but only goes back to a small number of them. After two or three visits, things become more serious. The girl's family goes in turn to the boy's family and a meal is prepared for them. If they eat it, it means that they accept the marriage. If the reply is positive, the boy's family still has to go to the girl's family in order to agree on the exact terms and conditions of the marriage. An auspicious day is fixed for the engagement and the matter is virtually concluded.

Some young women experience particular difficulties in getting married. This is the case of Rita, the daughter of one of the most well-off men in the village. She can bring some money into the marriage, she is pretty, hard-working and reliable, but she had her first menstruation on a Tuesday and this poses a serious problem. This means that her husband could die shortly after the marriage or fall seriously ill. Nobody wants to take this risk and Rita is getting older,

so that it becomes ever harder to find a young man. Several young women in the village do not have such difficulties and yet are still unmarried. This is often explained by poverty: although it is not absolutely necessary to be able to give a dowry, a wedding always costs a little money and so the poorest experience difficulties in marrying their daughters. Equally, many boys are still waiting to find a job which will allow them to found a family, and this also increases the age at which people marry.

A concrete example: Suvakin's marriage

To immerse ourselves in the atmosphere of matrimonial negotiations, we may examine a little more closely the negotiations which preceded the marriage of Suvakin, aged about twenty.

During the last months of my stay, this boy's parents started to look actively for a wife for their son. Before looking in detail at the transactions, we need to describe the people involved. Suvakin's family was quite well-off. He had one younger brother, five children having died in infancy. His father worked as scavenger at the municipality. His mother did not work. Suvakin went to school up to the eighth standard, and then went to work at the spinning mill at Karaikudi, where he earned less than three rupees a day. After a year, he left this very arduous job and he was no longer working when the negotiations took place. There is no doubt that Suvakin hoped some day to take over his father's job at the municipality.

There were several preferential spouses who could have been suitable for Suvakin. His mother, for example, had two brothers in the village: however she had a quarrel with the elder of the two and therefore would not take his daughters; relationship with the younger brother was rather distant, and the two families were almost not on speaking terms; so they did not want to take his daughter either. Since this was only a second preference, the problem was not too serious. On the other hand, there was a very appropriate spouse on his father's side.

Suvakin's father had a sister in the village who had two daughters: the elder was already married, and the other was of Suvakin's age and was quite appropriate. The two families were on good terms and visited each other frequently; the girl herself often went to Suvakin's house.

It was Suvakin's father who had to arrange the marriage of this girl, but his sister had still not asked him to do so, and so he had not taken any steps in this direction. His sister was widowed and quite well-off. She had given a good education to her daughters and owned a little land. Suvakin's parents liked the girl and yet the marriage was not to take place. There was a certain uneasiness on the subject, but it seemed that the two parties agreed to contract another marriage. On Suvakin's side, the parents insisted that they had the right to take the girl, but they added that Suvakin did not want to marry her. It seems that one of the main reasons was the fact that she had been to school up to the tenth standard and, in consequence, was better educated than Suvakin. He was hence afraid of feeling made inferior in the marriage and wanted to hear nothing of it; he emphasized, in addition, that a girl who worked at a printer's could not know anything about agricultural work or brick-making. Everybody knew that the young man had no wish to marry his *attai magal*. The parents hid behind their son's point of view and stressed that they could not oppose his wishes.

The two families never had a face-to-face confrontation on this subject, but it was clear that they no longer had any hopes for a marriage. Rayappan, Suvakin's father, told us that the marriage should normally be obligatory; if one of the parties wanted it to take place, then it should take place; 'even the tribunals would give such a verdict', he maintained. However he also asserted that if the two families agreed to marry elsewhere, then there was no problem. It was clear that the girl's family were not particularly keen on the marriage since they could have got in touch with Rayappan. For the elder daughter, they had not contacted Rayappan either, despite the fact that responsibility for the matter was his, and he had been presented with the *fait accompli*. The girl's mother was not unaware that the other party had started looking elsewhere and she had discreetly given her approval. Suvakin's mother noted, finally, that the girl called Suvakin by his name, and that this proved that she did not wish to marry the boy since a Tamil woman can never say her husband's name.

It was at a funeral in another village that Suvakin's parents came across a girl who proved extremely interesting. Suvakin's mother was very enthusiastic about the girl's beauty whom she described to us as 'short, round and fat'. Exactly what was wanted. She was an only

child, used to working well, and knew all the techniques of brick-making and agriculture. A little later on, the parents therefore went to Kalidităidal in order to approach the girl's family more closely. The girl turned out to be a relative of Suvakin (FZD), but a distant one. Be that as it may, the families knew each other well and the proposition was favourably received, but the girl's family wanted a son-in-law who would agree to come and live at their house, since their daughter was an only child. For Suvakin's family, this solution was unacceptable and the matter was forgotten.

This meant starting again from scratch. They had not counted, however, on Amalraj, who was Suvakin's MZS (and hence his brother). This man had married for love which had been the talk of the village in its time, but since then he had become reconciled with his in-laws (see above), and was desirous of reinforcing ties with them. He therefore let Suvakin's parents know that his wife still had a young unmarried sister at home. Negotiations were thus undertaken yet again and this time they took a favourable turn; a few months before my departure, I heard that the matter had been concluded, but that the marriage had not yet taken place.

7.3) Engagement, dowry and wedding feast: The Paraiyars have little taste for ceremony, and the simplicity of their rites of marriage contrasts with the importance they give to them. The various ceremonies related to marriage follow the pattern of traditional Tamil ceremonies but in a very simplified fashion. It should also be stressed that the marriage ceremony is considered to be of less importance than the festival of the first menstruation, which we shall deal with later. In the case of a preferential marriage, the ceremony is easily understandable: it is the *tây-mâman* who conducts the ceremony of the first menstruation of the girl whom he intends to marry to his son. For non-preferential marriages, the parties involved are different.

Once the girl's parents have accepted the meal given by the boy's family, the date for the engagement has to be fixed. In general, the Tamil calendar provides an auspicious date for this ceremony which is called *niccayâtarttam.* It takes place in the boy's house. The couple's horoscopes are compared and an astrologer, or the calendar, provides a good day for the marriage. The two *tây-mâmans* have to be present at this ceremony, as well as a few friends and relatives. In general, each party comprises between four and ten persons only,

since the girl's family will not have enough money to feed larger groups. In fact, the ceremony is a simple *paku mutarade*, or exchange of betel nuts. The two parties sit opposite each other and exchange the betel nuts along with ritual formulae. The boy's *tây-mâman* says, '*Ponnu unade*' ('The girl is ours'), while the girl's uncle says, '*Mappillai unade*' ('The boy is ours'). This consecrates the marriage. The Paraiyars say, 'It is as if they were already married', and nothing can stop the marriage any longer. We may see clearly that, here as well, it is the exchange which governs the relationship between the two families, and the ritual formulae used clearly express the isogamous nature of the marriage.

In general, the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam give neither dowry nor bride-price during the marriage negotiations. Most Tamil castes give a dowry, but the Paraiyars appeal to their economic situation in order to explain why, in general, the boy's family asks for nothing. Many men have thus got married without *stridhanam*. Ideally, however, it is correct to give something to the girl who is getting married: some claim that one should give a piece of nose jewellery (*mûkkutti*) and golden earrings. However, few women have such jewellery and it is often paste jewellery which is given. Somewhat more realistic is the statement that a girl should receive some crockery, pots, a small chest, a wicker mat and some clothes. In this way the girl can set up house and do her cooking. These objects are not necessarily new: they can be family utensils which were destined for the girl.

The dowry is not the opposite of the bride-price. The dowry does not go from the girl's family to the boy's family, but remains the girl's property. This is why it often consists of material goods, jewellery, etc. After the wife's death, they go either to her daughters or, if she has no female descendants, they revert to her family. In case of divorce or separation, everything the woman brought into the marriage remains her property. Her family is always vigilant about this matter: for example, Mecchi, a Hindu girl with rather well-off parents, had received a small plot of land when she got married. The plot was none the less registered in her mother's name so that her husband's brothers could not take possession of it. The girl's parents make a written note of everything they had given to their daughter in order not to forget anything. After the marriage, a girl often has quarrels on this subject: her sisters-in-law wear out her saris, 'the whole village' comes to borrow her crushing stone, one of her

husband's aunts has lost one of her pieces of jewellery, etc. Reciprocally, she is criticized for having brought nothing to the household despite the fact that she had cost a lot, etc. However we are very far here from the veritable martyrdom which the women of North India sometimes have to suffer, the tragic sequels of which can be read about in the newspapers. It is not uncommon that a woman brings nothing with her when she marries and the fact is accepted.

Reciprocally, the boy has to pay for the *tâli*, or pendant, which is the symbol of marriage. For him it is the principal expenditure of the marriage since the *tâli*, like any piece of jewellery worthy of the name, has to be made of gold. However, I strongly suspect certain people of not having bought a *tâli* since many women do not wear one, something which is hardly believable among the Tamils. They claim to have pawned it when their family needed a little money, which is quite plausible, but I think that in certain cases they had never received one. A *tâli* is worth a few hundred rupees, which is a considerable sum here. After the marriage, the girl's family has to give her a present at every visit made at home; this is often a dhoti, but here again the Paraiyars are not very orthodox and when the family is poor, the newly-wed has to be content with an ordinary meal. The presents which the boy receives after the marriage are called *marumallan seiru*. Normally he should receive one three times until the birth of the first child, but this is a custom which is mainly found among the high castes.

While a girl's wedding does not entail lavish spending, it is none the less true that dowry remains a norm. The Paraiyars live in a milieu where dowry is widespread, and it is only for economic reasons that they do not conform to this practice. If the family is economically privileged there is a tendency to require a dowry from a future daughter-in-law. People say, in the village, that certain Paraiyars have started to require quite considerable dowries. In such marriages, the question of status takes on greater importance. Marriage then becomes a matter of status whereas among the other Paraiyars it is still only a matter of alliance. Many families do not even speak about a dowry during the negotiations. This is even truer for preferential marriages which imply few negotiations.

The marriage ceremony among the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam follows the model of that of the majority of the castes, with however a certain flexibility. At this point, we come across a well-

known difference between Christian and Hindu Paraiyars. For the Christians, a marriage is a religious affair and is celebrated in church; in addition it takes place in the boy's village. Among the Hindus, it is in the girl's family that the ceremony takes place, and the marriage is not sanctioned by any religious personage. It is true that many Christian love marriages are never consecrated by a priest but, normally, marriage is a religious ceremony.

If the title of this section mentions 'wedding feast', it is meant somewhat ironically, since Paraiyar marriages are not ceremonies which gather together large numbers of people. Despite the differences between Hindus and Christians, which we have just noted above, the two principal elements of Paraiyar marriages are found in both communities: firstly, tying on the *tâli*, which is the principal rite of the marriage; secondly, the series of mutually rendered acts between the two families with the couple going from one family to the other. The marriage thus takes place in two places, with the newly-weds oscillating from one to the other.

Among Christians, the day before the marriage, one of the boy's brothers accompanied by a few relatives (FB or FBS, etc.) goes to fetch the fiancée at her house. The girl goes to her future husband's village accompanied by an even number of relatives: for example, her eldest sister and her husband, her brother and his wife, etc. Normally, the *tây-mâman* and his wife (*mâmi*) also have to be present. In one case I observed, the fiancée's party comprised her *mâmi* accompanied by her elder sister and her husband (eZ + eZH), her brother and his wife (B + BW), her maternal uncle and his wife (MB + MBW). All together, there were therefore seven people, the total number having to be odd.

They have to sleep in the church where a meal is given in the evening by the boy's family. Mass is celebrated early in the morning. First of all, the fiancé has to bring a sari for the fiancée which she will put on for the ceremony. During mass, the priest blesses the *tâli*, attached to a thread. The fiancé then ties the thread around the girl's neck making two knots, while his sister comes and makes a third knot. It is possible to think that this is a sign of the attachment which exists between brothers and sisters. Marriage in no way diminishes this attachment, since a brother has to watch over his sister's children whom he normally has to marry to his own children. The knotting of the thread comprises a double affinal tie since it brings onto the

scene the young man's sister, the young man himself and the bride, that is to say the representatives of three families.

The young couple is again received in the young man's house by his sister who revolves a platter with water, turmeric and an oil lamp several times in front of their faces. This is the *disti kalikkiradu* which aims at averting the evil eye. A meal is then taken in the boy's house, either breakfast or lunch. At any rate, the next meal has to be taken in the girl's house. The couple goes there accompanied by the boy's party. The latter must comprise as many people as the girl's party: if seven people on the girl's side came, then seven people (including the bridegroom) have to go back to the girl's house. The meal there has to be a response to the meal taken at the boy's house: if a chicken was eaten at the boy's, the girl's parents have to prepare two chickens. In general, not many take part in these meals apart from the boy's close relatives, again because of the obvious economic reasons. This is a far cry from the huge wedding feasts which take place among the high castes, where guests can number up to a few hundred.

In the evening, or the next day, the couple goes back to the boy's. They take with them the girl's 'dowry goods'. Ties between the young bride and her family remain close. It is expected that she should regularly come and spend a few days at her parents' with her husband. Her parents will, among other things, come and invite her with her husband for the village festival. In addition, she is supposed to spend the month of *âdi* (July-August) at her parents' house. Finally, it is to her parents' that she will go back to give birth, at least for her first child.

Hindu marriages follow the same model, apart from the fact that they take place in the girl's village and that there is no religious ceremony. Thus, there is no priest present to bless the marriage and the *tâli*, but rather an odd-numbered group of old men. Here as well, the visiting party comes to the village the day before the marriage. A supplementary journey is however necessary: on the day of the marriage, both parties meet at the boy's. After some time (sometimes several days), they go back to the girl's parents' where they again spend several days before finally going back to the boy's family.

This marriage ceremony, despite its simplicity, employs the essential elements of marriages in the area. It is an exchange of mutually rendered acts between two families who do not meet. The more well-off the families, the more are the presents which go from one family

to the other (see Dumont 1975b: 62-3). The symmetrical character of these exchanges reinforces without any doubt the isogamous nature of Paraiyar marriage.

D) Married Life

1) The Nature and Forms of Marriage

1.1) Matrilocality: We have already seen that, usually, marriage is virilocal. This rule suffers, however, numerous exceptions particularly at Valghira Manickam where the proximity of Devakottai attracts numerous couples. In addition, there exists an institution which allows a young man to come and live at the girl's parents' as *vîdu mappillai* (son-in-law at home) and thus become heir to the house. In this case, the man renounces his rights to his parents' property in favour of his brothers. Boys are not interested by such a solution unless the girl's parents have some property: land or a brick house are interesting arguments. But if there is nothing to receive, it is not easy to convince them since their attachment to the village remains great. This practice is quite common and is found in all castes. A girl's parents will have recourse to this solution if they do not have a son. For them it is a way of keeping someone at home who will look after them when they are old.

Many couples from Valghira Manickam are in fact uxorilocal. We have seen that the economic opportunities offered by Devakottai explain this high frequency. I noted more than 15 per cent of uxorilocal couples. Most of them explained this by the fact that they had greater chances of finding employment in Devakottai. These couples are not considered to be an integral part of the village. They do not have the right to settle there. Some are obliged to live outside the village, while others are lucky enough to be able to live on land belonging to their wife's family. Such is the case of Vedamuttu who lives in a house which belongs to his brother-in-law. The couple's children, though they were born in the village, assert that they come from the father's village of which they rest members. It takes many years before an uxorilocal couple is finally accepted as members of the village, since a woman does not normally have any right to her ancestors' land.

1.2) Divorce and polygamy: Paraiyar marriages are not normally indissoluble. The Christians insist that divorce is forbidden in their community. It is no use pointing out to them the numerous cases of separation which can be observed in the village; for them divorce remains forbidden in theory. If the couple does not get on together, it is sufficient to make a separation and give back the *tâli* to the husband. His wife goes back to her parents. If there are children, the boys past infancy normally stay with the father. They will, anyway, belong to the father's village.

> Karuppaya has had a rather tumultuous love life. He had an affair before his marriage to Selambai. After his marriage, he did not break off his relationship with his mistress at all, and it seems that his wife was not much more virtuous. They separated, and Karuppaya has since married a third woman.

Among the Christians, equally striking cases are to be found:

> Pitche married Jay Mary who kept many lovers after her marriage. Pitche then fell in love with another woman, Michaelamman, with whom he contracted a civil marriage. They spent their whole life together, and Pitche died shortly before my arrival. The first wife started to lay claims on Pitche's property since he had not had any children. The villagers, however, gave their support to Michaelamman because of the first wife's 'character', and because his second wife had always lived well with Pitche and had looked after him when he was ill. They said, 'She suffered for him'. Nevertheless, were the villagers to give heed to their intended religious orthodoxy, it would be the first woman who would be his legal wife.

The same is true of Valluvan who abandoned his wife after having had a child by another woman. The couple has six children today, and is perfectly legitimate. Another man left his wife after a few months of married life but they never remarried. Here as well, the separation was never sanctioned by the villagers.

The cases of abandoned wives are innumerable. Stanislas left his wife and daughter one day because an evil spell had been cast on him. They are separated since, and do not even look at each other when their paths cross in the street. Jesuraj's mother was partly abandoned with her two children by her husband who left to live elsewhere. Sebastian sent his wife and three children back to her native village. Paulmary stopped living with her husband when he became a leper; he was sent to a leper hospital in Madurai. Taînis did not get on with his wife, and left her to return to the village with another

woman a few years later. Sowrymuttu remarried after the failure of his first marriage. All these examples, taken from the Christian community, show that separations are far from being uncommon. They are rendered possible by the absence of any social control. The parish priest never intervenes in the villagers' lives. No one has ever forbidden a Christian to leave his wife. Were someone to do so, the other person would smartly reply that he should look at his sister or brother-in-law, since every family is, in some way, involved in these separations. Among the Hindus, separations are just as frequent, all the more so since, basically, nothing forbids them. For example, Perumal left his first wife and married another woman. Remarriages require no ceremony (it goes without saying that this is the case among the Christians as well). The children of such remarriages are just as legitimate as any other.

Polygamy is permitted by the Hindus, not by the Christians, but is rare. In the village there is only one polygamous man: a Pallar who had had no children from his first marriage. He married, with his wife's consent, her sister. All three live under the same roof with the children born from the second marriage. Among the Hindu Paraiyars, I was told that two of Muniandi's daughters had been married to the same man, who left them a short time afterwards. Among the Christians, it is not customary for a man to have two women under the same roof. There was, however, one case a few years ago:

> Sebastian, a mason, had left his wife and nine children to go and work for several months at Karaikudi. He returned with a second woman who had had a child from a preceding marriage. Both lived together with Sebastian's wife and children. As the two women quarrelled constantly, Sebastian settled the second woman in his father's neighbouring house. The villagers were rather shocked by this union. The first woman's family tried to rally the villagers against the intrusion of this stranger. Sebastian replied to all the attacks by telling the villagers to deal with all the other disreputable cases in the village, before dealing with his. He went on to say that he had enough money to feed everybody, and the rest was his own business. After some time, the second woman and her child died.

The villagers are convinced that the first woman had used black magic to get rid of her rival. Since then, there have been no similar cases. An old Christian woman told me, however, that she wanted a second wife for her son since the first wife had not had any children. According to her, the idea was perfectly acceptable, but shortly after-

wards her son's young wife became pregnant and this avoided having to take such extreme measures. It should also be said that it is not sure that his mother would easily have found a second spouse for her son.

Among the Hindus, polygamy is permitted in theory. The husband has simply to be able to feed both his wives. In practice, however, polygamy is almost as uncommon as among the Christians.

1.3) Widowhood: Nothing forbids widows to remarry, unlike among the high castes. Remarriage of widows is somewhat scorned in India, and forbidding it is one of the first reforms made by certain low castes which are socially ambitious. This is not yet the case among the Paraiyars, even if, in practice, many widows do not remarry. Even if they can remarry, a widow still has to be able to find someone and this depends on her 'bait'. An elderly woman will have difficulty in finding a second husband. On the other hand, for a beautiful and attractive woman like Sangaul Amman, there is no problem despite her three children. After her husband's death, she soon set up house with the younger brother of her first husband. It is not 'levirate' in this case since the marriage was not desired by the families concerned. It was simply that the brother fell in love with his pretty sister-in-law and took charge of his brother's family. The couple never appeared before the priest. Here again, it was a secondary marriage, even if the children born from the marriage were just as legitimate as the others.

Another young woman remarried after the death of her first child. Her second marriage was a love marriage. A third young woman lost her husband a few years after the marriage. Her parents then arranged a second marriage which gave her several children. There is hence no objection to a widow remarrying. It is considered normal, especially if she is still young.

However, few men wish to marry a widow, especially if she has children. As the villagers stress, a widow then has to make do with lovers who, in fact, are not lacking. This is what happened to Jyothy after her husband's death: she had a lover from another village who came to see her frequently and by whom she had a child. Another widow eloped with Manickam who already had children. I am not sure that this situation arises as frequently as the villagers led me to understand. At any rate, there are a certain number of widows in the village who have not remarried. Not all of them are that old. Doubt-

less some of them are not keen to set up house again, while others are too old.

On the other hand, there are few widowers who do not remarry. A man is less independent than a woman and cannot do the housework alone. He needs help and many men remarry quite soon after having become widowers. Only very elderly men do not remarry. Pragasan's wife died in childbirth; she had three children. It was his wife's younger sister who took care of the children and Pragasan married her after a few years. They have had several children since then. The girl was desirous of contracting this marriage and there was no kind of obligation to do so. Sowrymuttu and Kâlimuttu, a Christian and a Hindu, also remarried after the death of their first wives. They already had children. They themselves arranged second marriages, but this time with women who were not related to the first wives. Levirate and sororate are thus completely permitted among the Paraiyars, even if they are neither obligatory nor automatic.

A widow has a right to her husband's property. She has at any rate the usufruct of the property, and her sons remain the normal heirs. However, she can also choose to go back and live with her family or remarry. In this case, she obviously loses her right to her deceased husband's property which reverts to his brothers, until the children come of age.

Generally speaking, we can observe that remarriage of widows and widowers is permitted. However, for widows, it is always a case of secondary marriages, while men contract marriages which are arranged with all the necessary rites.

2) The Economic Independence of the Household

Let us now revert to the case of a young couple who, immediately after marriage, normally go and settle at the boy's parents'. Here, it is almost possible to speak of a rule: it is the behaviour of the great majority of couples. I have not observed a single couple who settled down alone after marriage. The thing is all the more remarkable since virtually no couples remain living at their parents' either. This may be a left over from the still very recent times when the couple got married too young to be independent. Separation is not an expected phenomenon, but always results from a quarrel.

At the beginning, the couple is integrated into the parents' household. A place to sleep is reserved for them in the hut, but

cooking is in common as are finances. It is then that the young wife's ordeal begins. She has to do work for everybody, and her mother-in-law will get rid of part of the housework by entrusting it to her daughter-in-law. Quarrels inevitably start: her mother-in-law will complain that the girl does not work enough, her brother-in-law will say that her cooking is not good, and that she gives too much to eat to her husband. At first, her husband will be inclined to take sides with his family, but gradually the intimacy he shares with his wife will take the upper hand and he will start defending her. They will then install a second household within the same house: budgets and food are no longer in common. If problems continue, they will end up by building a hut outside the house, or on another plot of land belonging to the family. The two households then become totally independent and the children will never again live with their parents. This scenario is quite typical. Virtually all couples have this experience. The Paraiyars are incapable of living in extended families and there are very few dwellings in the village which house families made up of several couples.

If a man takes too long in making the decision to go and set up house alone, this can have serious consequences for his marriage. This is what happened to Sangaul.

> Sangaul used to live with his young wife and baby in his parents' house. The case was exceptional: a lot of people lived under this roof since a brother, who was a widower, lived there with his children, as well as the unmarried children of the family. Relationships between Sangaul and his wife were not good. He had quite severely beaten her and the young woman had gone back to her mother's. As was proper, he had gone to fetch her some time afterwards but another quarrel broke out.
>
> It seems that, one afternoon, Sangaul's mother was angry with her daughter-in-law who apparently had not ground the grain properly. An argument followed in which Arockyam, Sangaul's brother, intervened. Wanting to defend his mother, he struck his sister-in-law who was furious. How could she let herself be struck by her brother-in-law? Soon the whole village would come and beat her! To begin with, her husband supported her, by maintaining against his family that he alone had the right to beat his wife. If she had done something wrong, they should simply tell him about it and he would be perfectly able to give her a thrashing himself. This is what he did that very evening. He had doubtless judged his wife guilty and she threatened once again to go back to her mother's. Taking an axe handle he gave her such a thrashing that the young woman became unrecognizable; her whole body was swollen, and she had to be carried

to relatives'. She was unable to move for two days. She then tried to go back to her husband's, but she was driven away and a few days later she went back to her village with her child. She had told us beforehand that her husband was not a bad man but that her in-laws were impossible. She thus decided not to go back to her in-laws and would only go back to her husband if he, at last, decided to settle away from his parents' house. Otherwise their marriage would be broken off.

This story gives a good illustration of the kind of situation in which a young woman can find herself when she lives at her in-laws'. It should however be said that, unlike what happens in North India, this is an extreme case. For example, it was common knowledge that the mother-in-law in question here had a vile character. Usually, things do not turn out so badly and the quarrels are much less harsh than this one. As we shall see, Sangaul lost some of his credibility for having beaten his wife so harshly a second time. He should have taken her defence and set up house alone with her.

Several couples in the village were in an intermediary stage during my stay. With a few bricks, they had built a small independent hearth for themselves and did their cooking separately. If there is no available space, this situation can go on; otherwise, after a certain time, a new hut is built. Once they live away from their family's house, relationships with the boy's parents naturally become less strained. Gradually, the young couple becomes reconciled with their parents, but they henceforth constitute a united and independent household. If the young woman has a quarrel with her mother-in-law, her husband will naturally take his wife's side. This was the case of Subbaya who regularly threatened to kill his father because of the quarrels between the latter and Subbaya's wife. Amalraj's wife could not even stand living in a hut opposite her mother-in-law's, and also went back home. Amalraj brought her back and built a hut on the other side of the street. It becomes apparent that after a certain point the husband has to take a stance in favour of his wife and against his parents. The young couple becomes independent. As we have shown above, this social independence is a corollary of the economic independence of married couples. It contrasts with the importance which the Paraiyars attribute to the family but is not in contradiction with it—it is rather a condition for it. Family relationships in fact become better once the couple lives apart.

3) The Relationship Between Husband and Wife

These considerations show that the married couple constitutes an important relationship for the Paraiyars. As far as love marriages are concerned, this goes without saying since the couple has chosen—at the risk of spoiling relationships with the family—to live together for better and for worse. Arranged marriages are not really different: true affection rapidly unites the newly-weds. The husband, as we have seen, has to defend his wife against everybody. Sangaul, it is true, was not considered to be a model husband and the villagers took her side: if her husband did not want to live apart from his family, then a woman should go back to hers; the husband should assume his responsibilities. In fact, the young woman's brother actually took sides, whereas usually the girl's family tries not to get involved in her life—people say that she should manage to arrange things herself. But in this case, it was the last straw, so to speak. Taînis, her younger brother, hesitated between using a meeting of the panchayat to force Sangaul to go and settle apart, or having a good thrashing given to Sangaul by the men of his family. The latter solution would have meant the end of his sister's marriage to all intents and purposes.

The love which unites a young husband and wife is rarely tender and affectionate. The Paraiyars make fun of Europeans whom they have seen at Madras holding their wife's hand or shoulder. In India, the opposite sexes do not touch each other in public, whereas boys walk down the street arm in arm, or look each other tenderly in the eyes while holding hands. It would be degrading for a boy to do the same thing with a woman. A man has to be distant and haughty; he has to walk proudly without worrying about his wife who trots behind him, her arms full of children. Once again, this is a label which does not necessarily correspond to people's real feelings.

The Paraiyars also claim that a woman has to be respectful and discreet. She should not stretch out her legs when she is sitting and a man passes by. She cannot speak in public and she should not laugh in a man's presence. She should not speak too loud and should lower her eyes when she comes across someone else in the street. If, however, one were to conclude that Paraiyar women are submissive to this extent, one would make a great mistake. This image of women, inherited from the high castes, does not correspond to reality in the

village. Women's submissiveness is much more a question of formality than reality here.

Teknonymy is respected as far as possible: not only does a wife not call her husband by his name, but she cannot even say his name aloud. If her husband is called Anthony, for example, she will not say 'St Anthony's church' but 'the church which bears my husband's name'. During our investigation, when we asked a woman her husband's name, she would call out to her neighbour and ask her to say the name, or she would say, 'the same name as the sanctuary'. We then had to guess if the name was Arockyaiswamy or Arockyam: she stopped us when we had got the right answer. This practice is explained by the fact that, for a woman, her husband is a god and she cannot say this god's name. This is a male theory if ever there was one! Does she really regard this little man as a god? Certainly not: it is essentially a question of formal practice. Some young women, in fact, say their husband's name, but I am not sure that they would dare to address him by his name. It is a deep-rooted Tamil custom, but I think that it rather badly expresses the real relationship between men and women, especially among the Paraiyars.

A man's superiority is none the less clearly displayed. A man will easily accept that his wife takes the household in charge, but she is expected to show his importance in public. This explains Arockyam's anger in the following incident:

> During the off season, he had no work. So he went and joined the other men in the middle of the village and played cards. His wife, on learning this, was furious and went to reproach him with gambling away their last rupees instead of buying rice. Arockyam remained calm. He followed her back to the house, but gave her such a thrashing that she had to go to hospital, and he lost a lot of money—'100 rupees' according to him—on medical expenses. He did not assert that his wife was wrong, but he could not accept being insulted by her in front of the other men from the village.

Ideally, a woman has to remain discreet. I have clearly stated that the Paraiyars are not sticklers on this subject, but here Arockyam's wife had overstepped the limits. In other respects, women enjoy great freedom. They are often economically indispensable since, in many households, it is they who do the brick-making and thus their incomes are not negligible. Their economic situation puts them in touch with everybody. They go to work, meet other men and women, know the region, etc. This situation contrasts with that of high-caste women,

who only leave their houses once a fortnight, or even less, when their husbands decide to take them to a film or to some relative's.

It is thus hardly surprising to see that Paraiyar women are much more at ease in public. To be sure, if there are a lot of men, they will say less, but once they are accompanied by their family they feel much more relaxed. I remember a family who came to see us regularly: one day the mother refused to sit next to her son-in-law because, she said, she had to owe him respect. Once this distance had been established, the mother-in-law was in her element and her son-in-law had difficulty in putting a word in edgeways. We observed, every day, wives interrupting their husbands, shouting in a son-in-law's presence or getting angry with a male neighbour. We often had discussions with a couple during which the woman gave her opinion just as often as the man, told amusing stories and was far from being the less lively of the two. At work, women are also seen laughing with their colleagues, joking aloud or making fun of a passer-by. For example, a Hindu man asked us to a take a photo of him with his cow. His wife intervened and complained that all the other men wanted to be photographed with their family, but he preferred his cow. This is a far cry from the discretion which is expected of a woman.

It is often the woman who is in charge of the household. Unlike what happens among the high castes, it is often the woman who, in many cases, goes to market and manages the household budget. In such cases, the husband gives his daily earnings to his wife (though he keeps a little money for his tea). Women can get angry with their husbands, if the latter spend their money badly: Cinappan's wife went back to her father's because her husband had spent his money without bringing back the vegetables she had asked for. Paraiyar women are not afraid of going to market, haggling with the tradeswomen and trying to obtain goods on credit.

We have seen that it is women who do most of the housework. Men can also do a few minor tasks, but they work little in the house. On the other hand, they look after the children a lot. As we shall shortly see, children are greatly cherished and represent the goal of the Paraiyars' lives. Some men are, however, capable of going to fetch water or even do the cooking when their wives are ill.

Husbands have the right to beat their wives, and women themselves recognize this right. This right has limits, however. The case

of Sangaul illustrates this well, and a woman always has at her disposal a certain freedom if things go too far. The husband will be obliged to come and fetch her after some time. To start off, he remains proud, but rapidly, and sometimes under pressure from relatives, he has to go and beg her to come back. He then has to promise that things will get better, that they will live alone together, etc. Women have at their disposal the weapon of separation, which is also the case for men, since I noted at least fifteen cases where husbands left their wives. Bad couples thus always have the possibility of separating, and it is perhaps this which gave me the impression of frequenting united and well-balanced couples in the village.

Should one wish to examine the question of adultery and sexuality, one enters a domain where I have relatively little data. My observations correspond rather badly with the assertions made by the Paraiyars, and which are difficult to verify. According to them, there is not a single decent woman in the village (or almost) and not a single faithful couple. 'Everybody sleeps with everybody', 'This village is the worst of all', 'Prostitution is common here'. I heard these assertions at least a hundred times, but few could give me examples to illustrate them, apart from a few cases which I already knew and which were on everybody's lips. Coincidence?

Women or girls are easily taxed with being prostitutes. If a young man sees a girl talking to a man on the way to the village, she is a prostitute (*tevadiar*), an insult which the Paraiyars are not hesitant to use. Even if passers-by make fun of a girl from the village her reputation is tarnished. It takes little for the villagers to let serious insults fly. Such accusations do not seem to me always justified, far from it.

We have seen that adultery is relatively frequent, as is shown by the high number of husbands who have left their legitimate wife for another woman. This however is a far cry from the accusations brought by the Paraiyars since, in general, the husband will go and live with another woman. Men like Muttu's father, who was reputed to have had seven wives, are rare cases. It is also true that few married women elope with another man: apart from the case of Pitche's wife, who seems to have been the mistress of several men from different castes, there are few such cases. Two or three girls also have the reputation of being flighty and of having had many relationships with men.

On the other hand, I can cite numerous cases of 'virtuous' women: several women whose husbands had left them lived an 'exemplary' life after their separation. If one thinks about it, women in fact have little opportunity of being as 'depraved' as the villagers say. They are rarely alone: most of the time they are accompanied by another woman, even when relieving themselves. They thus do not materially have the time to meet men alone. The same is true of girls. I noted only one case of flagrant adultery in the village:

> Rayappan, a Christian, had an affair with Selambai who was a divorced Hindu woman. It was Rayappan's son who told us about it. Nobody made a secret of it. Rayappan's wife complained one day that her husband was spending all his money on the other woman. The eldest son, who was soon to be married asked his father to put an end to the relationship, since it sullied the family's honour and would stop him from finding a respectable wife.

Each time I was told about this case, I tried to discover other examples but nobody could (would?) give me one, and many asserted that such situations were not frequent. All this leads me to think even more that, apart from a few notorious exceptions, the essential part of the Paraiyars' sexual life takes place within marriage.

Young people told me, however, that it was common to have sexual relationships before marriage. People cited the case of boys who had 'girlfriends', but I am not sure that these relationships were any more than platonic. For example, everybody knew about Arockyaiswamy and Taïnis' love for each other; they used to talk to each other in front of the village shop, and had sworn faithfulness to each other. The other boys admitted that Taïnis had never touched the girl, who was still 'pure'. I have the impression that these love affairs do not end up in sexual relationships unless they are really serious and lead to marriage.

E) Birth and Children

Were one to seek a goal in life for the Paraiyars, it would certainly be of having children. Children are gifts of God and reciprocally, sterility is a terrible punishment from Him. To be called *malladi* ('barren') is the worst insult that can be hurled at a woman. A childless woman is a useless being and the whole object of marriage is procreation. This subject we shall examine in this section.

1) Abortion and Contraception

Under such circumstances, it is easy to understand that contraception is abhorred. Stopping a couple having children is unthinkable. Christians assert that it is a sin, and Hindus consider it unnatural. The condoms which are distributed by family planning organizations are given to children who use them as balloons. The Paraiyars even ask if there are pills for having children; the others do not interest them.

The high infant mortality rate encourages the Paraiyars to want to have large numbers of children. So many infants die that people are never sure that their own will survive. Few men have been sterilized. I noted three who had been; one of them was a quite elderly man who had had himself operated upon three times in order to get the accompanying cash incentive.

On the other hand, abortions do take place. A girl who is pregnant can go to see a witch doctor who will provide the necessary plants. It seems that married women also have abortions. I only know of the case of a woman who died after an abortion, but I was told that abortions were frequent and I was also told about a girl who had had two abortions.

2) Childbirth

A pregnant woman is happy. By becoming a mother she becomes a fully-fledged woman. She continues, however, to work, generally until quite late in her pregnancy. For the Tamils, pregnancy lasts ten months: the calculation is made from her last menstruation. In the ninth month, i.e. the eighth after fertilization, the parents of a girl who is pregnant for the first time, have to go and fetch her to bring her back to their home, where she has to give birth to her first child. She can also give birth to the subsequent children there, but this is not obligatory. It is her father who also has to take charge of the expenses related to the first childbirth.

The girl's parents go to their daughter's in-laws', with the ingredients for a good meal. The meal has to be prepared there and after the meal, the boy's father asks, 'Why this meal?' The girl's father replies, 'We have come to fetch our daughter who is pregnant'. However, as Sebastian told us, he did not need to use these formulae since his daughter's in-laws knew perfectly well why he had come!

Childbirth normally takes place at the village. There is a hospital at Devakottai near at hand, but it is too expensive. Childbirth is free

there, but it is necessary to give some baksheesh to the nurses and doctors, or the patient will be neglected. According to the husband of one young mother, one had to give more than 100 rupees. Thus it is only in an emergency that a woman will go to the hospital. During my stay, two young women panicked during labour. A cart was hastily pressed into service and they were driven towards the hospital. But each time, the babies were born on the way there, and so they retraced their steps back home. There are two midwives in the village, who work together. One is a Christian and the other a Hindu, but they work for both communities.

The midwives ask for only ten rupees for a childbirth. They learnt their art from scratch. When labour starts, they tie a sari round the woman's stomach in order to help the child descend. They make sure that everything is normal; if it is not, they send the woman to the hospital. *Nîm* oil is given to the mother to help her digestion. A few women relatives can help the midwife, but men have to leave the place since 'women in childbirth say things which a man should not hear'. Normally, women give birth lying on their back. In some areas of Tamil Nadu, women give birth standing up, but not here. The house would not stand up to it, since in this case the woman hangs on to the beam of the house. In rare cases, the woman sits on the midwife's thighs, the midwife sitting on the ground. The woman holds herself round the nape of the midwife's neck in a backwards position and a third person is necessary to bring the child out. The child is then born, 'as if the women went to the lavatory'. This method is used only in very difficult cases.

Once the child is born, the midwife puts a finger in the baby's mouth and presses on the glottis to stop any infection of the throat. She then takes the baby by the legs and shakes it for a few seconds, she then does the same thing hanging the baby by its arms. This is meant to 'chase away the impurities and illnesses it has in it'. The midwife then gives the mother a ball of turmeric, *nîm* leaves and jaggery sugar to which is added powder of crushed tiles. This ball fortifies the mother's milk and makes the infant immune to infections.

If the umbilical cord is tied round a girl's neck at birth, the Tamils consider the cord to be a *tâli* and this means that the child is married to her *tây-mâman*. When it is taken off, the girl becomes a widow and this means that the *tây-mâman* will soon die. The *tây-mâman*

then has to celebrate a *puja* to avoid this unhappy destiny. Colostrum is considered unhealthy and is thrown away. Ideally, the mother and child should not be fed for three days. The birth of a boy on a Friday or a Sunday is inauspicious.

3) Rites Related to Birth

The mother remains *tîttu* (impure) for thirty days after having given birth. She normally has to be isolated in a house or in a corner of the dwelling during this whole period. Nobody can touch her. She cannot go outside for nine days, nor can she go to fetch water, go to the temple or cook for thirty days. This is the rule, but there is no need to say that the Paraiyars do not respect it.

Often the woman is not even kept apart. However people believe that she should rest properly and be well fed since she is very weak. For some days after childbirth she stays at home to rest. The Paraiyars insist on this and do not really believe that the mother is *tîttu*. For the first nine days, she cannot eat rice or sweetmeats since this would be bad for her milk. Usually, she is given only bread, coffee, tea and milk. However, many Paraiyars prefer to feed the mother properly after childbirth and thus do not follow these dietary taboos.

The seventh, or ninth, day marks the end of the period of seclusion. The mother then has to take a bath of oil and put on clean clothes. She can then go out of the house, but cannot cook or fetch water. Once again, the Paraiyars do not respect this rule and they 'hurry to go to work as soon as possible'. On the seventh or the ninth day, the mother has to get good thir.gs to eat: custom has it that she can eat during a whole year only what she has eaten on that day. So, for example, if she does not eat chicken on that day, she cannot eat chicken for a year. There is no need to say that the Paraiyars consider this belief to be mere folklore. They do not have the means to buy all these things.

The thirtieth day marks the end of the normal period of pollution. At this stage, however, the Paraiyar woman has already been working again for a long time. It is normally on the thirtieth day that the baby is baptized. The ceremony differs according to the community. The Christians go to the parish to baptize their child. Once a month, the parish priest baptizes all the new-born children of the parish, after Sunday mass. A boy has a godfather and a girl has a godmother. Godfather and godmother are chosen in the village: usually a friend, a neighbour, or a relative. There is no particular function attached to

this role. Many villagers have been godmother or godfather several times and often they do not remember to whom. There is an interesting rite at the end of the baptismal ceremony: the mothers receive a lighted candle with which they go through the whole church, as far as the altar, where the priest blesses them in order to solemnly readmit them to the church.

Around the thirtieth day, the Hindus hold a ceremony to give the child a name: this is the *peyar suttuvela*. Usually, they write a few names on scraps of paper which they fold and put in front of the village goddess. They then ask a child to choose one of the scraps of paper; and this is how the baby receives his name. It is often the name of a god or goddess: Murugan, Ganesan, Muniayya, etc. If the parents do not like the name, they will call the baby by another, and this nickname will become the child's real name. Some do not even know their official name. Once the name has been drawn by lot, it is repeated three times before the god. If the child turns its head when he hears the name, it means that the child accepts it; otherwise another name has to be chosen. The Hindu Paraiyars—need it be repeated?—often neglect this custom and many do not even celebrate this ceremony. They simply decide to give such and such a name, without a ceremony.

Among the Christians, everybody has their child baptized, but the choice of name is not very important. Many parents leave the choice of the name to a child or a neighbour. The father sometimes has no idea of his baby's name and, in one family, the mother herself had forgotten it, since it had been a neighbour who had chosen it. Traditionally, the name has to be that of the Arockyai Mary (Our Lady of Good Health) sanctuary. This is why one encounters the following names in large numbers: Arockyai Mary, Arockyai Swami, Arockyam, Pitche Arockyam, Arockyai Raj, etc. In many cases, a nickname is given to the child and the baptismal name is then forgotten: the sisters of a convent had called a little girl Mathilda, but the villagers were unable to pronounce this name and so they called her Muttai; a boy who was baptized with the name Amalraj, is called Muckan. Generally therefore, the name does not indicate the personality of an individual. People prefer, on the contrary, to underline the fact of belonging to a community and the belief in a given cult, and this is what gives rise to multitudes of Arockyams and Sebastians. Recently however, fashionable names like Punida, Sabida, Raja, Rajiv, Pratip,

etc. have made their appearance. A traditional name can then be combined with a modern name, to give: Arockyai Sabida, Arockyai Punida, etc.

People are distinguished by their father's name, the first letter of which is placed in front of the personal name. For example, an Arockyam who is the son of Anthony will be A. Arockyam. The practice has it that the patronymic initial should be written in Roman characters. There is no family name here. A person only has one name, which sometimes is only a nickname. The *vakaiyara*, which could be called a 'family nickname', also renders the personal name more specific, but it is neither lasting nor official, as we saw above.

4) Boy or Girl?

For the Paraiyars, the birth of a girl does not represent the tragedy it constitutes for certain high castes. The Chettiars, for example, sometimes cry when a girl is born. It is not uncommon in India to hear parents say, 'I have three children and two daughters.' Among the high castes, having a large number of girls can mean being ruined, because the dowries are so large. At Valghira Manickam, this is quite unknown and the birth of a girl is not taken as a calamity.

To be sure, there is a preference for boys. Parents have to have boys in order to have someone to support them in their old age and look after them. A man who has no sons will regret it, but he will not be upset about it. For example, one of the two men who had been sterilized had two young girls in good health. He decided to be sterilized in order to be able to give a good education to them. He pointed out that, 'The third child could have been a girl as well.' He is happy with his two pretty girls. If a man has two boys, he will hope that the third child will be a girl. Some even admit to preferring girls because 'boys always quarrel'. Girls are very hard-working and some of them become the actual bread-winners of the family.

The really important thing is to have children. A woman who gives birth to two daughters will certainly not be called a *malladi*. The parents will be happy and the real tragedy is not having children. It is strange therefore to note that adoption is rare in the village. Adopting a child from an orphanage is something exceptional and there is only one such case in the village. The parents were very unhappy and are now perfectly content with their boy. The only kind of traditional adoption takes place within the family: if a couple has some property (land, house, etc.) and no children, they can adopt the son

of a brother or another relative. Adoption is complete in this case, but without property, nobody would accept to give a son in this way. There are hence relatively few cases of this. Vedamuttu, for example, was adopted in this fashion by an aunt, from whom he inherited her plot of land and her house. He contracted a preferential marriage as if he were the aunt's real son, and he no longer considers his consanguine brother as his real brother. He also gets on well with his real mother, but owes her no protection. Finally, if the parents die, the children can be taken in by another father (*citappa* or *peryappa*), i.e. one of the father's brothers; this is quite frequent, but it is not a real adoption.

5) Breast-feeding and Weaning

Children are breast-fed, often until quite late. If no birth intervenes, breast-feeding can last three years. This is the case of little Amali who is over two and has still not stopped being breast-fed. Her mother has tried everything to wean her, but to no avail. She tried, for example, to rub *nîm* leaves on her nipples in order to give them a bitter taste. This did not work and Amali throws terrible tantrums if she is not given the breast. A younger brother was born before she reached the age of three, and she was thus weaned by force. The child then had to go to the balwadi school and make friends there, and so is a little more detached from her mother whom she had hardly ever left beforehand.

When a mother does not have enough milk, the use of powdered milk becomes necessary. This poses a double problem: on the one hand, powdered milk is very expensive and, on the other hand, conditions of hygiene are insufficient to guarantee the child's health. A coolie's wages can only just pay for powdered milk and many encounter serious difficulties in making ends meet. In addition, the feeding bottles used are old and dirty receptacles which are not rinsed out. There is no need to go into the poor quality of water which, in addition, is not boiled.

It used to be the case that when a mother did not have milk, the baby was given a mixture of jaggery sugar with water (*panan karkandu*) or ragi flour and *kanji*. There was a Pallar family who used to feed their child in this fashion. The baby was very thin and cried a lot out of hunger, but the parents did not have the means to buy milk. Another solution used to be giving rice paste mixed with water and sugar. If no bottle was available, the mixture was introduced into

the bay's mouth with one's fingers. Babies do not receive solid food before the age of one.

The infant mortality rate is extremely high. In India, 10 per cent of deaths concern children under five years of age (Dupuis 1982: 213); at Valghira Manickam, the proportion is perhaps even higher. The number of children who die is incalculable. Every family has had babies who have died. It is not uncommon to come across families where five children have died. However, those who survive have a happy childhood as we shall see now.

6) Childhood and Adolescence

A child's social life starts from his earliest infancy. As soon as he can walk, he is immediately in contact with relatives and neighbours since all social life goes on outdoors. He is often taken in charge by a little girl who lives next door, by an elder sister or brother who takes him to go and play in the village. Between the age of two and three, the child will go to the balwadi school where he will find himself amongst children of his own age. Some children show a great spirit of independence, like a little girl of less than two, who can be seen wandering about the whole village on her own.

Children are free to do as they wish and are carefree. They can do almost anything and live like kings. They do not yet have to worry about food, and it is they who are fed first, if there is a shortage. Children play together in troops from their earliest youth. The games are often similar to those found in the West, but there are few team games and, of course, few toys. Children know how to use the smallest object as a toy, and sometimes they make some very ingenious ones.

Very few children work. Most go to school (in my opinion more than two-thirds). The children from the village do not stand up very well to this constraint and many give up after two or three years They then rediscover the village games, fishing, or swimming in the reservoirs.

The boys work less than the girls. Girls rapidly have to learn to look after the housework, cut wood, gather grass for the cow, fetch water, cook rice, wash the smaller children, etc. In the meanwhile, the boys spend their time making conversation with their friends, and watching down on the young girls from the parvis of the church. It is only at around 15 that they start to learn brick-making and agriculture. They then still work irregularly, except in the poorest families

where it is not uncommon that children work from the age of 11 to 12 on.

In this context, it is as well to remember that the Paraiyars do not know their age. Even the most educated of them are incapable of stating their age with any precision. For example, an elderly woman told us that she could hardly be more than 17. It is thus impossible to give with any precision the age of marriage, or of the first menstruation. In the same fashion, time is always very approximate for the Paraiyars, as we have already underlined.

Everything changes once a young man has to earn his living. Hard work and the worry of finding a source of income then begin. Before this, his life is carefree and happy.

7) The First Menstruation

There are no rites of puberty for a boy. But for a girl, the ceremony which follows her first menstruation (*manjal nirattu vella*) marks one of the most important stages in her life. It is a ceremony celebrated by the Paraiyars almost without fail, which shows how important it is.

As soon as the girl starts menstruating for the first time, she is secluded on the veranda, or in a corner of the house, and has to stay there for eight days. The ninth day is the day of the ceremony, properly speaking. This can take the form of a very solemn occasion including printed invitations. Normally things happen in a simpler fashion, but it shows that the Paraiyars attach quite an importance to this ceremony, which they sometimes consider as being more fundamental than marriage. Many guests are invited, and all bring presents and good food: *idlis*, *dosais*, eggs, all of which are nutritious and which are meant to give the girl energy. Custom has it that the flour used to prepare these dishes has to be hand-ground, otherwise the food loses its goodness.

The *tây-mâman* is the most important personage in this ceremony. On him is incumbent the duty of marrying the girl, and the ceremony of the first menstruation has the aim of making it known that the girl is ready to be married. The *tây-mâman* has to bring numerous presents: kitchen pots, saris, rice, turmeric powder, perfume, fruit, coconuts, etc., according to his means. He will have to give nothing more for the girl's marriage.

It is the *tây-mâman's* wife, the *mâmi*, who celebrates the most important rite: in the presence of the women participants alone, she

has to pour a mixture of water and turmeric on the girl's head saying, 'You must have sixteen children and lead a long life'. The girl takes a bath of oil and then goes back to the guests, who sit in front of the house, where she is placed in the middle, on a small stool. The *tây-mâman* then gives her his presents and she has to go back into the house to put on the sari which she has just received. The other guests then give her their presents: rice, cloth, a little money, fruit, eggs, etc. Everybody then eats a meal together. Among the high castes, the ceremony can take on great importance, with many guests and a great number of presents. Here things remain on a Paraiyar scale. The girl is now becoming a woman. Henceforth she is nubile and boys' parents can start taking an interest in her.

F) Relationships Within the Family

1) Relationships Between Parents and Children

In the preceding pages, we have seen the essential part of the relationships between parents and children. Parental authority is not greatly asserted; in a society where values are weak and where children are greatly loved, few constraints are put on them. Parents think that there will always be time, later on, for them to face up to their responsibilities. In the meanwhile, they have the right to have fun with complete freedom. Only school constitutes, to some extent, an obstacle to their freedom, but the Paraiyars only stay there for short periods. Few are the parents who, like Pragasan, thrash a son for having played truant. It is true that children are seldom punished and only in very serious cases are they given a beating: Arulswamy and his brother had stolen and eaten flour which their parents had kept hidden; another youngster had almost set fire to the mud roof while playing with glowing embers in the house—they were all soundly spanked.

Children are more coddled than beaten, and even fathers like to play with their offspring and caress them. When they grow older, they acquire greater independence, but they remain very attached to their parents. I had the impression that it is only after having got married, once they finally opt for the independence of their own household, that young men fully assume their responsibilities. Girls are obliged to do so a little earlier, since they have to leave the family home as soon as they are married.

There is a great contrast between the physical relations between parents and children in infancy and the absence of any physical contact afterwards. A baby is constantly carried about, and is always in the arms of his parents or brothers and sisters. Once he is able to walk, people continue to carry him, coddle him and play with him. Once he becomes older, a barrier installs itself between him and his parents, and also between him and the opposite sex. Boys continue to hold each other by the shoulder or by the hand, while girls content themselves with delousing each other. But never again will they touch their parents.

We have seen that quarrels between a married son and his parents are frequent, but they diminish once the young couple has settled in another house. Quarrels which continue are rarer. Selavraj, whose marriage we described above, is one of these cases where arguments with parents continue. Usually, the reasons for such quarrels are trifling and are quickly forgotten.

When parents become old, it is their children who have, in turn, to look after them. They then go and live in one of their children's homes or they alternate between each of them, like an old Hindu woman who changes house every week, since she has five sons. It is often the youngest son who has custody of the parents, since he is the last to have got married and, in which case, he has a right to the family house. But this is not an absolute rule. Grandchildren adore their grandparents with whom they love to play.

There is no social security here, and the children are the only kind of help when someone stops his active life. The Paraiyars stop working when they feel they are getting too old to stand up to work. It is difficult for me to define the average age for retirement, since the people concerned do not know their age. At any rate, there are few elderly people in the village. Most mature men (around 40 years of age) no longer have their parents; this is hardly surprising. The Paraiyars attach little importance to old age. We have seen that young people are often in opposition to the old. People say that the latter should be respected, but this is only a good intention not much observed in daily life. Old people are dead weights and bring in no money. Old people without children have to live by begging. A few old women hence live in deplorable conditions. Succourless, some elderly people commit suicide. This is why a couple has to have children, preferably boys.

Boys, because inheritance is from father to son. The sons inherit all the father's possessions, which is not very much: a wretched hut on a bit of land, a few pots and some tools which have to be split up among all the sons. Daughters inherit their mother's property, that is to say, in most cases, some jewellery of little value. Inheritances often give rise to quarrels between the sons, and this is why some fathers split up their property in their lifetime. In one Hindu family with five sons, the father's piece of land was split into five plots. The brothers drew lots for the plots, and each occupied the plot he had drawn. In one Christian family, there was a brick house to be divided between two brothers. The elder received the west part of the house, and the younger the east part, according to custom. The house, however, has only one room and the two families are not on speaking terms because of a quarrel.

Usually, it is the youngest son who receives the house where the parents live since he is the last child to live with them. This is not simply a theoretical rule, but common practice. The youngest son of a family confirmed this by explaining to us that the youngest son is the one who receives the least from his parents, since he was born last and thus has the privilege of receiving their house. The elder son did not agree with this theory, and he underlined that it is the eldest son who has worked the most for his parents, and the house should therefore be his. One can see that dividing up an inheritance can create problems. Some go as far as destroying the house and splitting up the building materials. If a man has only girls, it is their sons who inherit his property.

Girls have no rights to family property. On the other hand, they do not have to look after their parents when they grow old. Taïhis, who lived by begging in the sanctuary, had a married daughter in the village but he refused her help because she would have had problems with her in-laws. A Hindu widow preferred to live alone in a hut rather than be taken in charge by her daughter and her son-in-law. When a man has only daughters, he often has the means to marry her to a man who will accept to be *vîdu mappilai*. This is quite a frequent occurrence, and it is then the son-in-law who becomes heir and looks after his wife's parents when they can no longer work.

2) Relationships Between Brothers and Between Sisters

The brothers in the same family constitute a *kulam* or lineage. If one of them dies, his children will be brought up by the others. They have to take a united stand with respect to the outside world. When the father dies, the eldest son has to take the family in hand, and arrange the marriages of the younger children. Such at any rate is the theory.

In reality, relationships between brothers are not always very good. From adolescence onwards, relationships become somewhat distant. The eldest son is superior to the youngest, even if this superiority implies few privileges. They speak little to each other. For example, when Suvakin wanted to know his younger brother's opinion concerning a girl he wanted to marry, he entrusted his mother with the task of questioning him about the subject. Two brothers often communicate with each other via their mother with whom communication is easier. There are, as we have seen, very few families without quarrels. Brothers are often enemies. The number of brothers who have no longer been on speaking terms for years is incalculable. All relationships between the two families are thus cut off. An inheritance is obviously one of the crucial points which leads to a rupture. Sometimes quarrels are less serious: people are not on speaking terms, but there is nothing really serious, and if an important problem arises the brothers are able to face up to the situation together. In other cases the rupture is absolute:

> Pragasan took charge of his sister after she had been left by her husband and had fallen very ill. He and his wife had to nurse her for many months. His brothers never helped him, but when the unfortunate woman died, after months of suffering, they came and demanded their share of her jewellery. Pragasan refused to share the jewellery and the rupture between the brothers became complete.

Two brothers are, above all, rivals. They are doomed to live near one another and divide up their father's property, and this rarely happens without difficulty. We have seen that the quarrel often starts between the eldest son's wife and the younger brother who is not yet married. Sometimes a quarrel breaks out despite a fair sharing out: the five brothers we mentioned who split up the plot of land are no longer on speaking terms. It is each man for himself. If the father

dies when only one son is married, the latter often seizes the property and refuses to divide it up afterwards.

There are none the less brothers who get on with each other. This is the case of Arulananda who went to live at his brother's, after having separated from his wife. Two men took their brother's children in after the brother's death. Arockyam brought up his younger brother, who had been born just before their parents' death.

There is relatively little to be said about the relationships between sisters. Until they marry, they are united and share the same housework with their mother. After they are married, they have relatively few contacts since they are married into different families, and even in different villages. Relationships between them are not particularly bad: unlike their brothers, they have no deep reasons for quarrelling. On the other hand, they see each other seldom. The relationship is therefore good but relatively indifferent.

3) Relationships Between Brothers and Sisters

This is not the case with the relationships between brothers and sisters, which have their continuation in avunculate and affinal ties. Often, a sister takes care of her brothers right from childhood. If she is older than her brothers, she becomes a veritable little mother, and one often sees little girls carrying on their hips children hardly younger than themselves. Even if she is younger than her brothers, she soon has to look after the housework and serve the men before being able to eat herself. Ties of affection are thus created between brothers and sisters.

Unlike what happens between two brothers, a brother and sister are not rivals. What one of them wins is not at the expense of the other. In addition, unlike two sisters, they are not separated by marriage. The brother has to take part in arranging his sister's marriage. He himself cannot marry before his sisters have found husbands. If the father dies, he is directly responsible for his sisters' marriages. We saw above that it is the sister of the bridegroom who has to make the third knot in the bride's *tâli* at the marriage ceremony. It is by these marriages that he reinforces his family ties or creates new alliances. To have sisters is to have allies.

Reciprocally, a brother soon becomes a maternal uncle. A woman's brother has precise obligations concerning her children. He has the

right to take one of his sister's daughters as wife for his son. If he does not want to, or if this is impossible, he is obliged to arrange his niece's marriage. A marriage cannot be contracted without the consent and participation of the *tây-mâman*. It is he who is the principal figure in the ceremony of the first menstruation and, without him, the ceremony cannot take place. If he wants to take his niece, he has the right to come and take her and marry her to his son. The *tây-mâman*, to some extent, replaces the mother's father who is often deceased when the children are of marriageable age. It is therefore very difficult for a sister to quarrel with her brother, and this happens much more infrequently than quarrels between brothers.

The *tây-mâman* actualizes the ties which unite two families by marriage. Relationships between brothers and sisters are indissoluble. If a woman is abandoned by her husband, she will go back to her brother's where she is taken in. She will exert pressure, in order that her children be married to this brother's children to preserve the ties which unite him to her family. A woman never cuts off ties with her family which constitutes her last resort in case of problems. A woman who is beaten will inevitably go back home. She will have difficulties in getting on with her mother-in-law and her brothers-in-law, but she always remains attached to her brother, and this is why a woman likes to give her daughter to her brother's son. The brother can look after the girl just as he looked after his sister. Marriage between cousins allows people to minimize the dangers of making alliances by remaining within the sphere of consanguinity.

G) Conclusions

The internal structure of the caste is based on kinship ties. There is continuity between caste and kinship. In this respect, the conclusions of this chapter will be a continuation of those of the last chapter; the organization of marriage and kinship is based on the equality between the Paraiyars. Differentiation in status and anisogamy are not possible where there are no hierarchized groups. On the contrary, marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin encourages even more the absence of authority and isogamy by uniting families by twos, and by encouraging the search for other partners, once the principle of reciprocity has been respected. Under such conditions, it is not surprising that love marriages, which are in contradiction with arranged marriages having the aim of improving status, are perfectly tolerated here and

are common practice. Everything takes place between equals. Considerations of status never enter into the choice of a partner. The ceremony of mutually rendered acts between affines clearly bears witness to the equality of allied families, just as does the almost complete absence of dowries. Tambiah has shown that costly dowries encourage hypergamy, and we can note, as a corollary, that the absence of dowries accords better with isogamy.

As everywhere in India, the family is of great value for the Paraiyars. They cannot live without a family, cannot live without being surrounded by their own kin. On the other hand, they have difficulty in accepting large family groups which necessarily imply a more centralized authority. The importance they give to the family cannot efface their distaste for authority. As soon as he can, a Paraiyar will escape parental authority, and the more distant relationships between two brothers do not last much longer either. The nuclear family is the only model which can guarantee a certain stability in a milieu such as this. Via his sisters, a Paraiyar can, on the contrary, extend his family network and compensate for the frequent ruptures within the family. Sisters and their husbands are not intrusive; they do not attempt to impose their authority or dictate courses of action like an elder brother or a father.

The practice of preferential marriages also encourages the repetition of alliances within a relatively restricted group. The Paraiyars marry within a circle and rarely go and find women outside it. They have not yet unified the different sections of their caste, as the other castes have done. This would require a certain organization, more centralization and a leadership which is wanting.

This brings us quite naturally to pose the question of the changes in kinship relations. It seems to me that these relations have remained remarkably stable among the Paraiyars. The high occurrence of preferential marriages is there to prove it. Whereas this practice is regressing among other castes (see Dumont 1975b), it appears as still being firmly rooted among the Paraiyars. The financial questions which more and more preoccupy the Indians in marriage negotiations are also not very marked here. Nobody in the village has the means to give or expect costly dowries. The Sanskritization of customs is still not very pronounced: love marriages are accepted as well as the remarriage of widows and divorce. A caste which has social ambition often starts by forbidding these practices which are highly discredited

in India and are associated with the lower castes. Paraiyar women also enjoy great freedom which is hardly compatible with the feminine ideal among the high castes. The indivisible family which is to be found among these castes is absent among the Paraiyars. It thus seems to me that the Paraiyars have preserved the kinship institutions which were theirs in the traditional system.

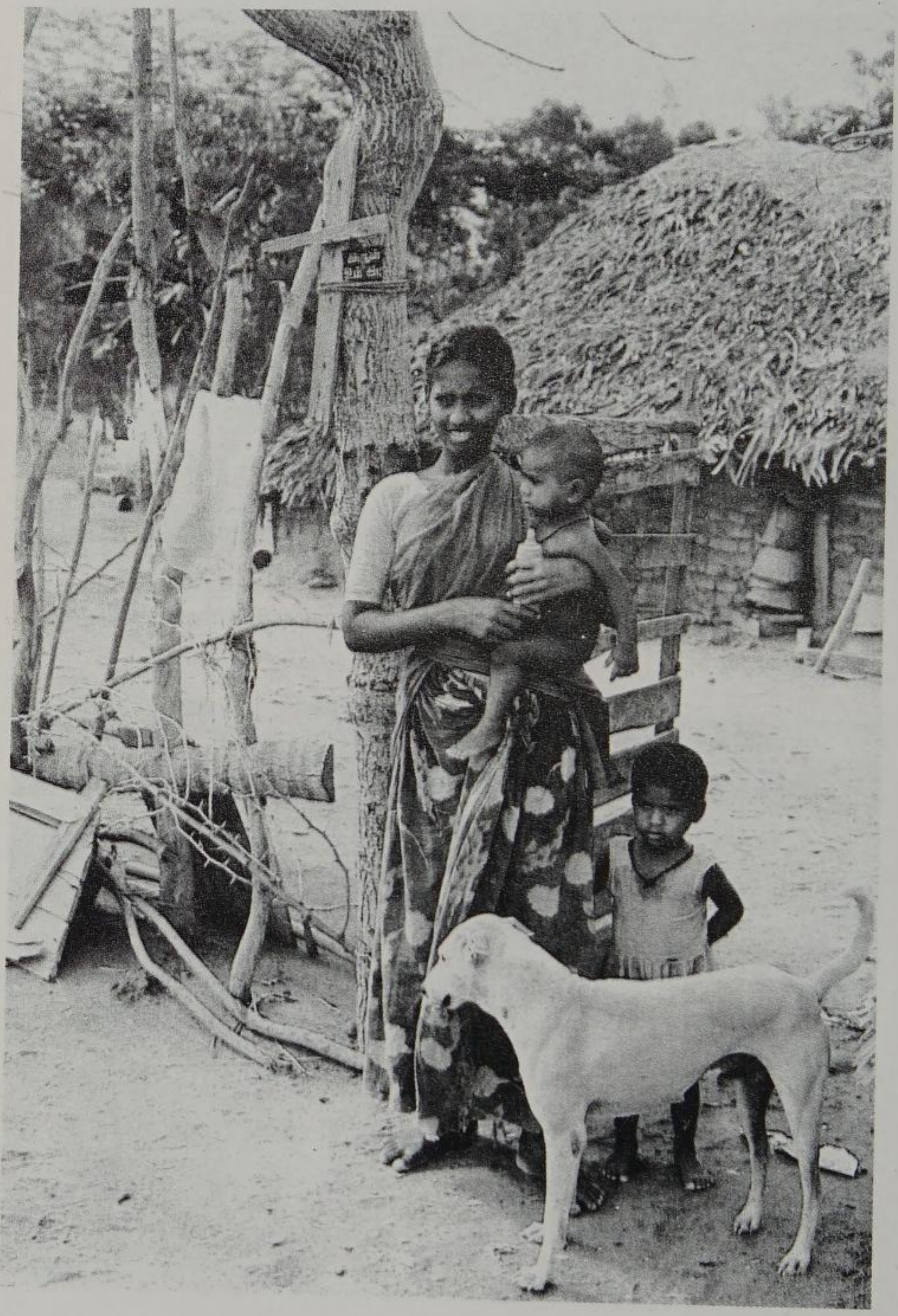
An old lady with her grandchildren.

Sweeping the floor.

Transplanting paddy.

Old man, crippled, rope-making (note that the house is without walls due to the lack of funds).

A couple at work brick-making (note the different body techniques, only the woman can lean down).



A mother with her children.

6. Worship and Beliefs

A) General Considerations

While the evangelization of India has inspired quite a number of historians, the forms of worship and observances of Indian Catholics have not been of great interest to us, and we only have at our disposal information which is scattered, if not negligible, on this subject. The Catholics constitute, however, a not insignificant community in South India. The present chapter intends to make a contribution to the resolution of this problem.

Analysing the Paraiyars' religion is not without posing certain problems. As we shall see, the Paraiyars are very bad theologians, and their religious knowledge remains very superficial. When they are brought to express their beliefs, the Paraiyars are at a loss and sometimes even suspicious. They often say that they do not know, or that they know nothing about the subject. During our discussions about religious questions, the villagers were often surprised at our questions: 'Why do you ask me in particular? I know nothing about such questions.' Some, who were even more suspicious, wondered what was the hidden reason for these questions, and many admitted that it was the first time that they had talked about such subjects. Some Catholics went so far as to be afraid that the parish priest would be told of their ignorance, while the Hindus asked themselves if my enquiries did not hide an intention to proselytize. The most striking fact was the general ignorance concerning religious questions. The Hindus know virtually nothing of their mythology or the legends of their deities. The great gods like Shiva or Vishnu are almost unknown. Unlike the Hindus, the Christians are subject to dogma and to a Church, but despite this, their religious knowledge

is very weak. Many almost do not even know who Jesus is, have no idea of monotheism and most believe firmly in reincarnation.

1) Marginalization and Religion

This ignorance can be explained to a great extent by the social marginalization of the Paraiyars, and is its religious corollary. The further one goes down the Indian social ladder, the more one diverges from the Brahmanic ideal with its constant preoccupation about ritual purity. Local beliefs become stronger and the 'demons' take the place of the great Sanskritic deities.

The untouchables' religious life is thus essentially 'pragmatic'. Notions such as that of bhakti, or worship of the gods, are almost absent from the lower castes' cult. Here, people only address themselves to the deities in case of need (Freeman 1977: 25), and people are not greatly preoccupied by spiritual well-being. The vow constitutes the fundamental religious institution of the Paraiyars.

The South Indian Catholic Church being strongly marked by caste divisions, it has made the Paraiyars second-class Catholics. The Paraiyars are little involved in the religious life of the Church and they have thus preserved a great number of their own religious beliefs. Everything which could be termed the exterior aspect of religion has considerably changed: the religious ceremonies are those of Christians in general. People go to church, rather than to the temple, to venerate the Virgin Mary or Saint Sebastian. Even from this limited point of view, assimilation is far from complete: the Paraiyars do not go to Sunday mass, often get married without a religious ceremony, and are not very worried about confession. If, however, one ignores temporarily this somewhat superficial aspect of religion to examine their beliefs, daily prayers and observances, it appears that the religious life of the Paraiyars is not very different from that of their Hindu brethren. In point of fact, the difference between the two cults is undervalued by the Paraiyars themselves: 'God is one and it is men who give him the name of Jesus, Shiva or Karuppaya', is a statement that is often heard.

According to Fuchs (1950: 253), the untouchables of India have a particular veneration for female deities. This is true of the Balahis of Central India and the Mahars of Maharashtra (Patwardhan 1973: 36, 55), whose main deity is Mariai while in Tamil it is the cult of the goddess Mariyamman which is particularly developed among the untouchables (Moffatt 1979: 246). Since they are naturally attracted

by female deities, the Catholics have found in the Virgin Mary the Christian equivalent of their mother goddesses. They have also found in Arockyai Mary an additional dimension: not only is she the guardian of the village, the goddess of protection, but she is also love: the mother of the Paraiyars, who loves them as her children. In fact, it is because of these qualities that the villagers differentiate Arockyai Mary from Mariyamman, despite the striking similarity of their names. Arockyai Mary never strikes down those who have done evil. She is fundamentally benevolent, whereas the Hindu deities, who are often irascible, can be the cause of many misfortunes and illnesses.

The Paraiyars' cult symbolically reproduces the relationship of dependence which exists on a socio-economic level. Here again the Paraiyars are the inferiors and those who have to ask for something. The essential element of their religious life consists in trying to obtain favours from supernatural beings. As earlier, the relationship with the outside world is characterized by the mutual exchange of acts which becomes particularly apparent in vows, sacrifices and pilgrimages.

There is another aspect. It is not through fellowship with the Catholic community that the Paraiyars have found their identity, but rather through the cult of the guardian of the village. It is she who protects the villagers from outside dangers and her festival is the culminating point of village life.

2) Catholicism and Untouchability

Catholicism has not been able to spread in Tamil Nadu by transcending caste barriers. Quite the contrary, since it actually relied on caste differences, and the Catholic Church exactly reproduces the social cleavages of Hindu society.

In 1606, a young Italian Jesuit, Roberto De Nobili arrived in Madurai: this was the real beginning of Tamil Catholicism. In De Nobili's opinion, it was first and foremost necessary to pay attention to the Indians and understand their culture. It was thus necessary to apply efforts to converting the Brahmans who were 'the true guides of the nation' (Auguste Jean 1894: 6). De Nobili hence adopted the lifestyle of the Brahmans, ate like them, studied the Vedas and avoided any kind of contact with the impure castes. He even pushed his orthodoxy to the point of avoiding missionaries who worked among the lower levels of the population.

At Madurai, the Church thus split into two parts. De Nobili's methods did not gain universal adherence and provoked numerous

complaints. These were of no avail, since Pope Gregory XV allowed priests to wear the sacred thread. Among other things, the inquisition of Goa decided that the use of wooden sandals (as opposed to leather, i.e. impure), topknots, ritual baths, etc. were purely civil customs and not religious observances, and that they could therefore be tolerated within the Catholic Church (Ferroli 1951: 397). Later on, a distinction was even made between two sorts of missionaries: the *sannyasis* who lived in conformity with Brahmanic customs and the *pandara swamis* who worked among the lower caste Catholics. Pope Benedict XIV even tolerated the creation of purely pariah missionaries.

The rites controversy which enflamed the Church during the eighteenth century and which led to the suppression of the Company of Jesus ruined the numerous successes obtained by the missionaries. The Tamil Church fell from 2 million to 350,000 in the space of a few years. Be that as it may, the structure of the Tamil Church had been marked for life. Many higher castes, like the Vellalars, the Udayars and the Maravars had been affected by conversions.

Even today, the Church is divided by caste and the untouchables are still marginalized. As Fuller (1976a) has underlined, the Catholic Church had no difficulty whatever in adapting itself to the caste system and in fact never even showed any real will for change.

B) Organization of Worship at Valghira Manickam

1) The Parish: Isolation and Frustration

In India, a parish can comprise between 20 and 40 villages. Valghira Manickam is thus a simple 'sub-station' of the parish of Devakottai, situated at Ramnagar, only a kilometre south of Valghira Manickam. The parish comprised sixteen villages for 1,703 parishioners in 1970. Although the parish priest has an assistant priest, he only visits the villages at regular intervals and the frequency of these visits depends, to a great extent, on the relationship the priest maintains with the village. All official ceremonies, apart from funerals, take place at the parish. Most villages have a chapel or church, but their use is minimal and offices are rarely celebrated there.

Apart from the children who go to school, the villagers go relatively infrequently to the parish, except to obtain a certificate of baptism, to ask the priest for a service, complain about a specific problem, etc. The geographical proximity does not help to break the

social barrier which separates the parish from Valghira Manickam. Yet, together with the Udayars (550) and the Vellalars (478), the Paraiyars (473) constitute a large community of worshippers in the parish (i.e. 27 per cent of the total number of parishioners). In the diocese of Madurai, it is the Paraiyars who constitute the largest Catholic community (18.3 per cent).

None the less, the Paraiyars feel themselves to be marginalized within the Church. They feel the dominance of the Udayars and the Vellalars to be unjust and shameful. For them, 'The Church does everything for Mullikundu and nothing for us.' Mullikundu, as we have seen, is the neighbouring Udayar village and the point of reference for the inhabitants of Valghira Manickam. The Paraiyars cite many examples of favouritism towards the Udayars. They stress the fact that not a single Paraiyar works at the parish which, however, uses quite a lot of staff for its schools, orphanages, etc. Even the Arockyai Mary sanctuary does not receive the necessary support. The Church is thus a source of frustration for the villagers.

There is no real Christian community. Friendship between an Udayar and a Paraiyar is unthinkable. Even the parish priest calls the Paraiyars '*parapayan*', a contemptuous term which designates the untouchables. In some villages, such as Kilyur, the Paraiyars are the Udayars' agricultural labourers and accomplish *adimai thozil* tasks for them. At Mullikundu, people do not hide their scorn for the Harijans. An Udayar farmer told us that, 'If my daughter wanted to marry a Harijan, I would kill her'; the same farmer regrets that today young Paraiyars do not remove their turban and sandals when they approach an Udayar.

An incident took place which almost ended in serious trouble, when an Udayar girl, who was possessed, lived for some time in the Arockyai Mary sanctuary. She was courted by the catechist of the time, Arockyam, who, although married, ran away with the girl. The couple came back after a few days. The honour of the Udayars having been compromised, they gave a serious beating to Arockyam under the approving eye of the parish priest. Fortunately the matter went no further.

The Paraiyars feel their conversion to be a failure. Christianity has not brought them the security and dignity they hoped for. Consciousness of this engenders a certain disillusion: 'Being Christians brings us nothing.' In addition, the Christian untouchables, as we

have seen, are not recognized as a 'Scheduled caste' and therefore enjoy none of the legal privileges accorded to their Hindu brethren. Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising to see a large number of Christian Harijans convert to Hinduism. The great temples, like the Meenakshi Temple at Madurai, administer Hindu 'baptisms': the convert receives a certificate and can, in this way, claim a right to the legal advantages. For the rest, he continues to be a member of the Catholic community. Today, mass conversions do not yet take place, but one can ask oneself the question if this does not represent a valid alternative for the educated Harijans who aim at a career in government services.

The risk of conversion is high in the village. The recent conversion of some Hindu Pallars to Islam, throughout Tamil Nadu, shook the untouchables. Despite their threats, the Catholics do not really envisage converting and thus conversion does not weigh heavily in the balance for the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam. Their consciousness is not sufficiently strong for this. On the other hand, I had the opportunity of meeting more militant Harijans who seriously envisage this alternative and use it as a threat.

In brief, we may say that the Catholic Paraiyars have not really found in the Church a community affording help, as they had hoped. Their relationships with the Church are distant and purely ritual.

As for the Hindus, they do not have a greater feeling of belonging to a community, but in this case, such a state of affairs is less surprising since there is no Hindu 'Church'. No Brahman would serve the village. The religious obligations of the Hindus are less demanding than those of the Christians, and nothing obliges them to go outside the village for religious ceremonies.

2) Religious Officials

2.1) The parish priest: In the eyes of the villagers, the parish priest really does personify the Church. It may be stated that the relationship between the priest and his untouchable flock is almost always bad.

Father Sakrias, who was the parish priest during the 1960s, was the exception that confirms the rule. He is universally recognized as having been one of the village benefactors and especially for having developed the sanctuary and having built the church. The villagers claim that Father Sakrias was a Paraiyar like them. In fact he was a

Paravar, that is to say from a fisherman caste which is quite a low one, but higher than Paraiyar. The insistence on this priest's caste is none the less significant, as is the insistence on the caste of his successors: all the other parish priests have been Udayars and, it is added, never wanted to help the Paraiyars. It is in fact said that a Paraiyar priest 'is something impossible'.

The parish priests are accused of having concentrated their help on Mullikundu. The Paraiyars do not speak to the parish priest as to an equal, but they remain in the background, with a respectful attitude. The parish priest, in return, talks to them with humiliating expressions like '*poda*' or '*wada*' ('come here' or 'go away').

The villagers also claim that the present priest is the worst of them all. Few have anything good to say of him, apart from the mason who does some work for the parish. This almost universal antipathy in no way stops the villagers from trying to obtain favours from the priest, even if they know that there is little hope. Once, at the end of the feast of the Virgin Mary, the priest spoke to the villagers, and said that he would try to help the village; I heard a man grumble at the back of the crowd, 'Hypocrite! That is what he says, but he thinks the opposite.'

The parish priest may, from time to time, give specific and limited help to villagers in distress, but the Paraiyars are quick to point out that the sanctuary, which is situated on their territory, brings in thousands of rupees to the parish.

The villagers'attitude towards the priest is typical of the attitude which an untouchable shows in the presence of a high-caste person, that is to say being discreet, humble and distant. There is no question of looking him in the eye or of speaking loudly in his presence. The parish priest is feared but not respected. Although he is at the head of the local Catholic community, he can in no way be considered to be a leader. Nobody would ever have the idea of addressing oneself to him in order to solve a social problem. Several villagers, in fact, complained that the priest showed no interest whatever in the good moral order of the village. Divorce, adultery and cohabitation are common occurrences, but the priest never intervenes. Yet it is a known fact that parish priests enjoy great influence in India. In Kerala, for example, they even tell people for whom to vote (Klausen 1968: 71). Nothing of the kind takes place here. The priest does not even visit the sick, or families that are in difficulty. One never comes

across him in the streets of the village, and I do not think that he visited a single family during my year-long stay. At Mullikundu, on the contrary, the parish priest exercises enormous influence.

The parish priest contents himself with accomplishing the basic rites. He delivers certificates of baptism, baptizes, celebrates Sunday mass, where the Paraiyars are seldom present, marries young people, performs blessings for those who want them and administers extreme unction to the dying. On Saturday evening, the parish priest, or the assistant priest, comes and celebrates mass at the sanctuary of Arockyai Mary, but this is not a real service rendered to the village. The parish priest also intervenes in the village festival, 'for the profit he makes out of it', say the villagers cynically. He is also the organizer of the balwadi school, since he receives the subsidies from the Catholic Relief Service.

The parish priest is thus not of the same kind as the ones to be found in our rural parishes. This, at least, is the case as far as his relationships with the untouchables go, since the role one would expect of him is found in his relationships with caste people from other villages. Once again, it is possible to claim that this distance between the parish priest and the village results from the very structure of the Catholic Church and its division into castes.

2.2) The catechist: In each of the parish's sub-stations, the priest has at his disposal a representative who, in fact, simply carries out his orders; this is the catechist. The catechist contrasts clearly with the parish priest since he originates from the village community and is in no way distinguishable from the other inhabitants. His task is not a very rewarding one and even makes people smile.

The *koyilpillai* (from *pillai*, child, and *koyil*, temple) can in no way be considered to be a leader, and Susse, Valghira Manickam's catechist, is no exception, any more than his predecessors who still live in the village. The first, Ignatius, was accused of embezzling money from the sanctuary for his own use and had to resign. We have already mentioned Arockyam's love life: he was Ignatius' successor and ended his term of office with a beating. Susse, his successor, is a good man, with three boys. He contracted leprosy a few years ago, but seems to have been cured in time; he works as a mason.

Ideally, the catechist is a link between the priest and the villagers. In fact, he is hardly more than a servant. He receives 40 rupees a

month for his trouble. Relationships between Susse and the parish priest are not much better than those with the other villagers.

The office of *koyilpillai* attracts insults rather than glory on behalf of the villagers. The catechist is constantly suspected, if not accused, of theft and people do not hesitate to point out to him that leprosy is not a disease which appears by chance. He easily becomes the scapegoat and has to put up with a great many insults.

His principal task is to ring the bell for the Angelus at 6 p.m., and to conduct a prayer session (*jabbam*) afterwards at the sanctuary. Only a few villagers are present at these meetings, while several children come there to get a blessing.

On Wednesday and Saturday, the catechist prepares the sacred paste made with turmeric and oil which is put on the foreheads of the faithful. It is also the catechist who writes down in the sanctuary's ledger the vows which are made there and the promises which go with them. When the parish priest wants to say mass, Susse prepares the altar and the various utensils; here he is to some extent playing the role of a sacristan.

The catechist also plays a social role. It is he who has to convene the villagers in case it is required: when there is a serious argument, for example, one of the parties can ask the catechist to ring the gong in the evening, in order for the villagers to meet on the parvis. This procedure is theoretical and Susse has no memory of ever having had to carry it out.

Susse complains about the low respect people have for him. His role is a thankless one. According to Susse, a good catechist has to be patient, persevering and be able to face up to the villagers. He is the village servant, and the village makes sure that the services he renders do not become advantages. The slightest suspicion can lead to his dismissal. The villagers' sarcasms constantly remind the catechist of how modest his function is.

2.3) The old catechist: Susse is the official village catechist. The person we have called the 'old catechist', who is, in fact, Susse's father, is not an official personage. Yet it is quite undeniable that Arockyam, an old man who is almost blind, plays an important role in the life of the sanctuary of Arockyai Mary, even if this role is not recognized by the villagers.

This retired municipal scavenger lives almost permanently in the sanctuary, even if he is supposed to share his house with one of his

sons. His wife still cooks for him, but he generally shares his meals with the pilgrims. Arockyam spends most of his time in the sanctuary, sitting against a wall on the right-hand side of Arockyai Mary. Sometimes, pilgrims ask him for a blessing, or to massage an injured limb with sacred paste. The members of his family maintain that he has a special gift conferred on him by Arockyai Mary, and that a simple laying on of his hands on a sick stomach or an injured hand is enough to heal them.

Arockyai Mary can make manifest her wishes through Arockyam. When Father Sakrias wanted to move the statue from the sanctuary to the church, she appeared to Arockyam in a dream in order to say that she refused to be moved. Father Sakrias then fell ill because he had refused to listen to her, and he had to submit to Our Lady's will. But it is in cases of possession that Arockyam is most active. When an evil spirit starts to speak, it is Arockyam who questions it, and he then tries to know what is the Virgin Mary's will.

It is also Arockyam who carries out the 'punishments' determined by the Virgin Mary against the evil spirits, such as for example giving 100 blows on the head with a *nîm* branch. Arockyai Mary can also dictate her wishes directly to him:

> A woman who was possessed, and who had spent several months in the sanctuary went back to her village, Teralapur, before having been healed. The following night, Arockyai Mary appeared in a dream to Arockyam, telling him that the woman should not have left. Still in his dream, Arockyam went to Teralapur and appeared in the woman's dream, in order to transmit the Virgin's message. The woman woke up, told the story to her husband and went back to Valghira Manickam where she was healed after a few days.

Arockyam thus intervenes as a medium in cases of possession. He is very much used to evil spirits, who have no power over him. He has deep faith in Arockyai Mary and is afraid of the Hindu gods more than anything else.

The 'old catechist' makes no money out of his gifts, apart from the meals which the pilgrims give him. Most of the villagers do not acknowledge that he has any kind of power, and many make fun of him. His acts are only just tolerated. One day, the villagers forbade him to officiate in the sanctuary, because he had been accused of getting money out of the pilgrims. He was forced to go back and live in his house, but he soon came back to the sanctuary. There is

no doubt that he would again fall victim to popular justice, if he were to receive money.

It is the pilgrims who acknowledge that Arockyam, who is not a prophet in his own land, does possess some special powers. In the village, he has no more prestige than his son, and is called a charlatan. Once again, we may observe that the villagers have difficulty in accepting that one of their kind can rise socially.

2.4) The pusari and the Hindu seers: Because there is no Hindu Church, neither is there a hierarchically organized priesthood, and the Brahmans do not constitute a corporate body. The Brahmans refuse to serve the untouchables, who thus have their own 'priests'. The word 'priest' imperfectly translates the Tamil term *pusari* or 'he who offers the *puja*'. The *pusari* has no particular power. He is not a personage situated above the common mass, and plays no role whatever in the population's spiritual or moral life.

The present *pusari* is Karuppaya. He was appointed a few years ago to replace Kaliappan. He was chosen because no one else wanted the post, which implies no material advantages, apart from getting part of the *prasadam* (offerings) at each *puja*. According to the rule, the *pusari* is elected only for one year, but since candidates do not actually swarm through the door for this office, this election is not repeated, but for exceptional circumstances.

The main task of the *pusari* is to celebrate a *puja,* when a request is made. Karuppaya has no particular knowledge in the religious field. When he fell ill a few years ago, it was to the Christian sanctuary of Arockyai Mary that he went. Karuppaya, it is true, is respected but this is more because of his character than because of his ministry. Discreet by nature, he intervenes little in village affairs.

Kaliappan, the previous *pusari,* somewhat resembles the old catechist. He has not abandoned his religious calling, but his qualities as an exorcist and seer are not really acknowledged within the village. Kaliappan is, in fact, one of the poorest men in the village, a sad record indeed. He always officiates outside the village.

Kaliappan's personal god is Karuppaya who takes possession of him when he is in a divinatory trance. Kaliappan has the power to drive out evil spirits. At each exorcism, he receives a little money, but his economic situation is a pointer to the frugal nature of his earnings.

The third, and last, Hindu religious personage is the most colourful of them all. Selambaï, a woman this time, is acknowledged by everybody as being able to heal smallpox. In this respect, she differs from Arockyam and Kaliappan whose merits are only acknowledged outside the village. None the less she makes no money out of her function, any more than the other two.

Selambaï, whose age is between 30 and 35, is separated from her husband, and is the mistress of a Christian. She does a multitude of little jobs in order to survive. It is Mariyamman, goddess of smallpox, who conferred her gifts on Selambaï by communicating to her the necessary mantras. If someone suffers from one of the different kinds of smallpox, he goes and sees Selambaï who will heal him in three sessions, after which the sickness leaves the patient's body. For each session, Selambaï receives 1.25 rupees.

'Smallpox' (*ammai*) means all illnesses which manifest themselves by eruptions of the skin, boils, etc. Fever and itching are the surest symptoms. If one suffers from *ammai,* it is necessary not to go to the hospital, since it is Mariyamman who takes possession of the body, and any kind of injection would incur her wrath. Many children have died because they did not observe this principle.

Selambaï's reputation is not much better than that of the other religious officials. Her morals are even considered to be of a rather low standard. It thus appears that worship in the village is characterized by its spiritually acephalous nature. There is no guide, or chief, to establish dogmas or define beliefs.

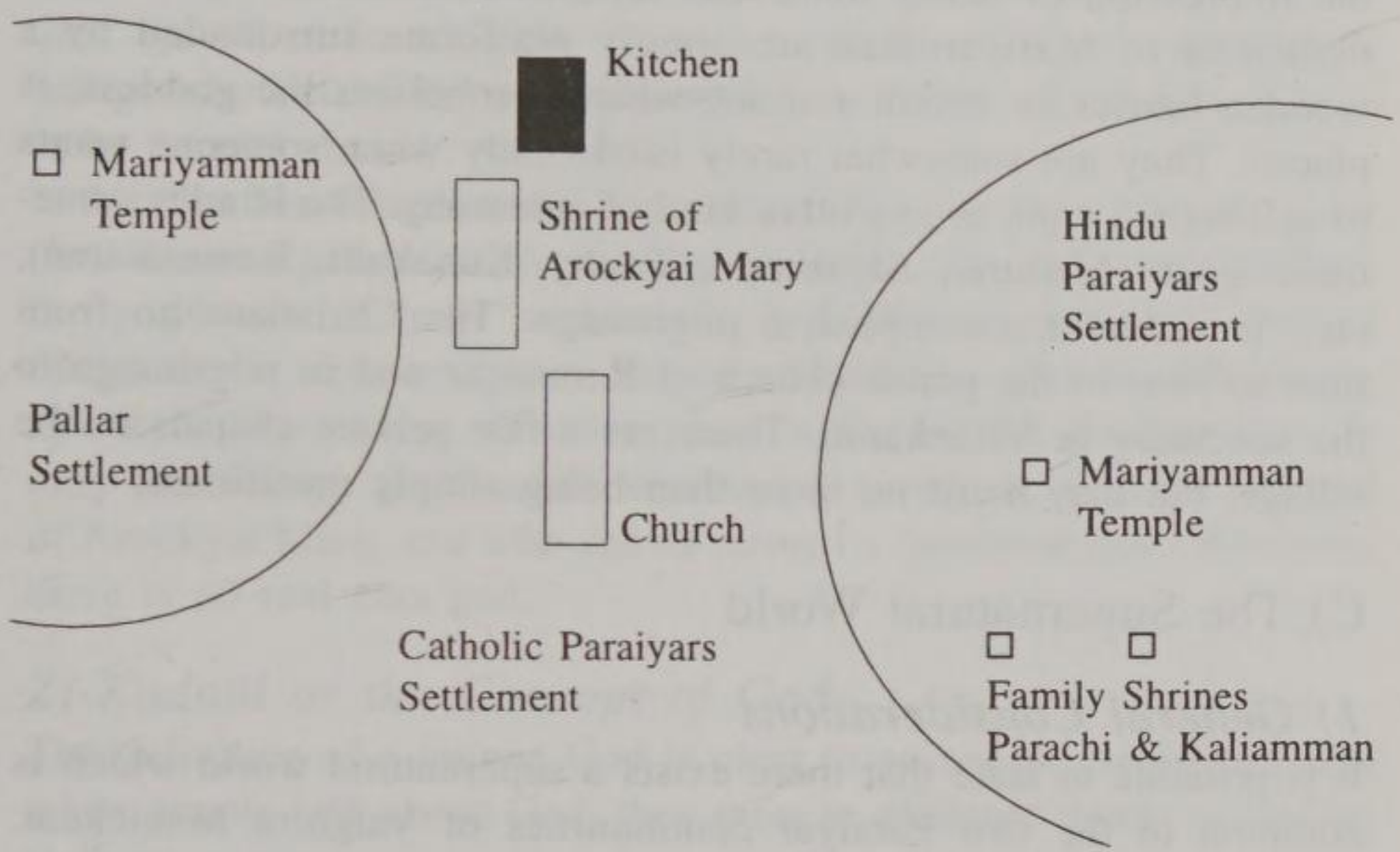
3) Places of Worship

There are several places of worship in the village. The sanctuary of Arockyai Mary is the most important religious edifice, or rather, it is the only one which has some importance. The Hindu Paraiyars have a small temple dedicated to Mariyamman, as do the Pallars.

East, in Hindu mythology, is the region of the gods and is auspicious by nature (Reiniche 1981: 46). Hence, all these buildings, including family chapels, are turned to the east.

The sanctuary of Arockyai Mary, to which we have constantly referred, is always full of activity. Arockyai Mary (Our Lady of Good Health) is the Virgin of Velankanni. The sanctuary's origin is not known, but ever more people go there, mainly in order to exorcise an evil spirit, when someone is possessed. The villagers' pride in their sanctuary is boundless. People will say, 'People come here from all

Plan 3: The geographical location of the main religious buildings in the various communities of Valghira Manickam



over Tamil Nadu'. It is a fact that I had the opportunity of seeing Brahmans there and many people of high caste, principally Hindus.

Women who are possessed go there in great numbers. They stay for several weeks, even several months. One also sees 'madmen' attached to a tree by a thick chain, and all kinds of 'sick people', such as women with menstrual problems or unhappy mothers who have had difficulty in surviving the death of their babies. These pilgrims give the village a cosmopolitan air, and relationships between them and the villagers are good.

Wednesday and Saturday are special days and a lot of people from neigbouring vicinities swarm there. When a villager passes in front of the sanctuary, he stops to make the sign of the cross. If someone falls ill, or loses consciousness, he is immediately carried to the sanctuary. The sanctuary is clearly the residence of the guardian of the village.

The church, which is a bigger building, does not have as much importance. It is mainly used as a storehouse and its parvis, as we saw in Chapter One, is the village community centre. It serves as a nursery school, a civic hall, a reception room, a public dormitory and

a place for meeting. There is always a group of young people there who ironically observe what is going on in the village.

Compared with these Christian buildings, the Hindu temples give the impression of being somewhat insignificant. The small temples dedicated to Mariyamman are simply platforms surrounded by a wooden barrier on which a stone, which symbolizes the goddess, is placed. They are somewhat rarely used—only when someone wants to celebrate a *puja,* or any other kind of ceremony. The Hindus sometimes go to Madurai, Algarkoyil, Trichy, Kunakudi, Rameswaram, etc., in order to accomplish a pilgrimage. The Christians go from time to time to the parish church of Ramnagar and in pilgrimage to the sanctuary at Velankanni. There are a few private chapels in the village, but they merit no more than being simply mentioned.

C) The Supernatural World

1) General Considerations

It is possible to state that there exists a supernatural world which is common to the two Paraiyar communities of Valghira Manickam. However, the deities do not have the same value for both of them. The reality of the Hindu pantheon is not questioned by the Christians, but for them it is made up of malevolent beings who control the evil spirits, the *peys-pisasus.* For the Hindus, on the contrary, the 'Christian gods' have, to be sure, a positive value, but they are only invoked as 'chosen (or personal) deities' (*ista devam*) and never within an institutional framework such as the rites of passage, marriage ceremonies, etc.

The Christian deities tend to be vegetarian and the Christians are often opposed to Karuppaya or Kâlimman, to whom people offer blood sacrifices. The Hindus of Valghira Manickam rarely refer to the vegetarian Hindu deities and all the gods which people their supernatural world are minor deities. The characteristics of these deities are unclear and even analogous; they have to be humoured and they do not possess the love and tenderness which are universally recognized as characteristics of the Virgin Mary. Muni, who is both a god (*devam*) and a spirit (*pey*), clearly expresses the ambiguity of the Hindu gods. Karuppaya (literally, the 'black lord') is sometimes considered to be a deification of night that haunts forests and reservoirs. For the Christians, these gods simply govern the ritual order of the

world, that is to say that their main preoccupation is to do with purity and pollution. If a menstruating woman goes to draw water, it is the Hindu deities who are likely to strike her down. Each of them has at his disposal a whole army of *peys-pisasus,* each more malevolent than the other. In addition, there is a whole series of supernatural beings who inhabit the air round about the village which people have to be careful about.

Moffatt has established a clear distinction between personal gods (*ista devam*), gods of the home (*vîtu devam*), clan gods (*kula devam*), the goddesses of local settlements, and village goddesses. Such a distinction is not possible at Valghira Manickam. For the Christians, Arockyai Mary plays all these parts, while for the Hindus, there is only one village goddess (Mariyamman) to whom is added the cult of Arockyai Mary, and who can be termed a 'personal god'. However, there is no real clan god.

2) Kadaïl or the Concept of God

The definition of a unique God is clear to no one in the village, and when people talk about God, they refer to different things according to the context.

God is the ultimate point of reference, he who governs the world. He is unique both for the Hindus and for the Christians. To be sure, there are several gods (*devam*), but behind this multiplicity, there is only one divine being, Kadaül. When a Paraiyar is questioned about the world of the gods, on the differences between Karuppaya and Muni, or the relationship between Jesus and Shiva, he likes to reply, 'God is One. It is men who give him different names, but behind this diversity, there is only one God; that he is called Allah, Vishnu or Jesus matters little.' The Christians explain, in the same fashion, that there are many statues of Arockyai Mary, for example at Velankanni, Poondi, etc., but that behind this diversity there is only one Virgin Mary. After all, the sun can be reflected in a thousand jars of water at the same time.

This unique God has a complex nature. One refers to him, in the first place, when one mentions the world of the Divine in a general context (see also Reiniche 1979: 34). He then becomes a sort of abstraction which could be compared to the notion of chance or destiny. People speak about Kadaül to explain something which is almost unexplainable: a couple had to live apart for twelve years because that is what Kadaül wanted. Kadaül governs our lives. He would not

allow that the Pallars eat food prepared by the Paraiyars. When we sleep, Kadaül takes possession of our bodies.

The Christians call God *Andavur,* he who governs the world, *Sarviswaran,* or even Brahmâ. Kadaül is the regulator of the world, he arranges and regulates our lives; he is not greatly personalized. There are no representations of him, and people do not address themselves to him; people do not really pray to him, since there is nothing to ask of him. He is an impersonal being whose abstract nature contrasts with the anthropomorphic representations of the other deities. He does not really have a specific character. He regulates our lives and decides when we should be born and die. This is why people who commit suicide, or die by accident, become evil spirits: they should have continued to live as Kadaül had planned. Kadaül writes everything down in his ledger. He observes and acts, and decides on our fate after death. He is the supreme Judge.

For the Hindu Paraiyars, the great Brahmanic deities are more or less merged with Kadaül. They acknowledge the superiority of Shiva or Vishnu, but never invoke them. These deities never venture as far as this wretched village where such awe-inspiring personages as Karuppaya reign.

Jesus is not a popular figure among the Christians, who speak little of him, and have difficulty in situating him in the world of the gods. For some, as he is the son of Mary, he is inferior to her. People know that he 'suffered for the sake of religion', which is the ultimate mark of holiness among the Paraiyars. This is how a young man tried to demonstrate the specificity of Christianity to us:

> The most important god is Sarviswaran. He is even higher than Jesus. All the Hindu gods were his disciples. One day, these gods refused to obey, and Sarviswaran was angry. He made demons out of them, and said to them: you will be inferior beings, you will only be Hindu gods. You will only punish people and not help them any more. You will no longer live in houses, churches or villages, but only in forests, *kanmaïs* and waste grounds.
>
> Sarviswaran then created Adam and Eve in a magnificent forest. He forbade them to eat apples, but they were so attractive that Eve was unable to resist, and bit into half an apple. She gave the other half to Adam, who had just finished biting into it, when Sarviswaran called him: Oh Adam, what are you doing! Adam was unable to swallow the apple which remained in his throat. This is why, since that moment, men have an Adam's apple and women do not. This is the Christian religion. We do

not believe in the Hindu gods. Sarviswaran wanted to rule over the earth. He created Adam and Eve in order to send Jesus afterwards. Jesus is the incarnation of Sarviswaran on earth.

This text underlines the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism, which is an important theme in Christian mythology in India. The Hindu gods have to submit to the Christian gods. In Kerala, the apostle Thomas, according to legend, demonstrated the superiority of his god by changing drops of water into flowers (Pothan 1963: 14), and thus brought about the conversion of many Nambudiri Brahmans.

None the less, the two communities acknowledge the supremacy of Kadaül. Kadaül has written our complete destiny in a ledger; he is able to foresee what will happen in our lives. He symbolizes the divine power which exists outside what happens in the village. Like the great Hindu deities, who live in the big temples in the cities, Kadaül has little to do with the village. He is neither benevolent nor malevolent. He is rather a just Judge. He seems closer to the Hindu Brahmâ, the universal absolute or supreme principle (Renou 1951: 49), than to the nice old man with a white beard found in Christian imagery.

3) The Guardian of the Village

While there is no possible confusion between Arockyai Mary and Mariyamman, one of their functions makes them bear a resemblance to each other: they are the guardians of the village.

The Hindus sometimes have a tendency to confuse the two 'goddesses', but this point of view is not corroborated by everybody, and certainly not by the Christians for whom the superiority of Arockyai Mary is universally acknowledged. In fact we shall see that Arockyai Mary is sometimes put in opposition to Mariyamman, and hence the two are not to be confused.

There is however a fundamental homology between the two guardians of the village: both are linked to health. Arockyai Mary is 'Our Lady of Good Health', while Mariyamman is 'The Lady of Smallpox'. An equally fundamental difference distinguishes them: Arockyai Mary does not simply content herself with protecting the village, she is also goodness itself, she loves mankind and is always ready to help us. Such an intense relationship is not characteristic of the cult of Mariyamman which tends rather to be awe-inspiring.

The Hindus of Valghira Manickam seem to acknowledge Arockyai Mary's superiority. Even the *pusari* of Mariyamman's temple, Karuppaya, went to Arockyai Mary's sanctuary when he suffered from serious stomach pains. It is thus to the village's First Lady that we turn first of all.

3.1) Arockyai Mary: The Christians claim that Kadaül is higher than all things, but this superiority remains theoretical since, in practice, Arockyai Mary is all-powerful. Those who believe in her can obtain everything. It is to her that people address themselves in all circumstances, and for every kind of reason. Unlike the guardian of Tamil villages, she loves us and helps us. Not only is she protective, but she also gives counsel and she is beneficent.

The divine nature of Arockyai Mary cannot be put in doubt. She is not simply a saint (*punida*), but possesses the power and omnipresence of a god. While Kadaül is the last judge, Arockyai Mary deals with our everyday problems. Her immanence contrasts with the Creator's transcendence. Arockyai Mary is not the guardian of all the Christian villages. Saint Sebastian also enjoys great popularity, but the Virgin Mary is venerated everywhere.

Her superiority appears clearly in the following episode which concerns Peryaswamy, a Hindu who was *pusari* of a small temple at Sankara Parachi:

> On the way to Kanda Devi, there is the tomb of a girl. One night as he was going by there, Peryaswamy was violently struck on the head by a *muni*. He fell to the ground and, as he collapsed, he noticed a strange light which lit up in the night the sanctuary of Arockyai Mary, which is over a kilometre away, and not normally visible. A young woman then came out of the tomb, clothed in a white robe: she lifted up the unhappy Peryaswamy, after having poured a little water on his head. She helped him to go back home and disappeared in a ray of light. Peryaswamy then understood that Karuppaya had abandoned him, whereas Arockyai Mary had helped him. He realized that she was more powerful, and converted to Christianity. He left the village a short time afterwards and was not seen again.

Our Lady's superiority is such that even one of Karuppaya's protégés is helped by her. It is she who controls the territory of the village. This protection is so strong that it stops epidemics from getting into the village. A few years ago, Valghira Manickam was the only village to have been spared from an epidemic of cholera. It

is also impossible to be possessed by an evil spirit within the village. There are indeed evil spirits in the village, such as the legless Nundi, but they are inoffensive and can only do harm outside the village boundaries.

Arockyai Mary also protects the villagers outside the village, if they are honest and just. The Hindu gods, like Karuppaya, Kâliamman and Muni, are also in the power of the Virgin Mary. For the Christians, these gods are a great source of danger, but Arockyai Mary only allows them to strike people down if they do evil. In which case, she leaves the sinner in the terrible hands of the Hindu gods. These gods cannot reside within a village because they cannot stand human impurities.

Arockyai Mary thus rules over the whole village. It is to her that Shanti, the Hindu midwife, offers flowers and candles each year in order that childbirths will go off well. It is over all the communities that the mother of Jesus rules. The procession which takes place at the religious festival clearly marks out her territory, even if the Christians claim that she also protects Pani Pulan Vayal.

Certain Hindu gods can also be protectors, but they remain terrifying. For example, Kâli or Karuppaya can be invoked in order to harm someone, while this is unthinkable for Arockyai Mary, who is love itself. The Christians say that the Hindus do not have gods who love us, whereas all the Christian gods are benevolent. Arockyai Mary protects us from the constant danger which the Hindu gods represent, and she only allows them to strike us if we do wrong. On the other hand, she is also positive, since she puts right the harm done by these Hindu gods.

She is also beneficent and she heals. People can address themselves to her in all circumstances and she heals the sick who have fallen victim to various illnesses. She is particularly efficacious against illnesses which doctors are unable to heal. The latter are numerous and here the Virgin Mary is the last hope. People who have gone to see dozens of doctors come here and are cured. If an accident takes place in the village, it is to the sanctuary that people hurry.

A lot of her reputation is, however, based on her ability to heal cases of possession. Her power is an antidote to the Hindu deities and the Christians like to oppose the two on this point. The Hindu gods send evil spirits to possess human beings, while Arockyai Mary

drives them out. We shall revert later to the question of exorcism, which will be the object of a separate section at the end of this chapter.

The confidence of the villagers in Arockyai Mary is absolute. She is invoked for every kind of reason, and there is always at least one woman in the sanctuary asking her a favour. People can ask counsel of her. Kulanda uses three flowers for this: a white one, a green one and a red one which she places at the foot of the statue. She thinks of one colour, and asks the Virgin a question. If the latter wishes to express her agreement, the flower which the woman thought of falls to the ground. It is in this way that Kulanda and her husband bought a cow and then built a house with the consent of Matta, who also encouraged them to start up a brickyard which made money for them. We have seen that she also appears in dreams to the old catechist, or in a ray of light to help Peryaswamy. One young boy from the village who suffered from epilepsy was praying in front of the statue, when an unknown man gave him some mantras which he held in his hand. Since then, the boy has no longer been ill.

The villagers thus have no lack of proof of Arockyai Mary's power. She can even appear in person:

> Sowryamman was unable to have children. One day, a woman dressed in white came to the village. She said that those who wanted a child simply had to follow her. Seven women followed her as far as the sanctuary, where they received a potion. The Lady disappeared. During the weeks which followed, Sowryamman was very agitated at night and Our Lady of Velankanni appeared to her in her dreams. One night, she dreamt of a great festival in the village; the Lady in white came to fetch her in order to take part in this festival. When she arrived behind the sanctuary, the Lady in white gave her a small parcel. The next day, Sowryamman was pregnant.

Arockyai Mary is truly the only superior being who loves this untouchable population so much, and the untouchables reciprocate the affection. Her cult gives the village its unity. She controls its boundaries and protects its inhabitants. Government services, the Church, doctors, the police, all have scorn for the untouchables. Our Lady, however, is always ready to help them. Compared with the devotion she inspires, Mariyamman's cult, which we shall now examine, seems somewhat insipid.

3.2) Mariyamman: Mariyamman is the guardian of thousands of villages in the region (Dumont 1957: 388). Normally, Mariyamman protects villages against epidemics and evil spirits, but at Valghira Manickam, the Hindus themselves acknowledge that this role is perfectly accomplished by Arockyai Mary.

None the less Mariyamman is quite clearly the goddess of the Hindu community. When a name is given to a baby, it is usually to her that people address themselves, even if the ritual laxity of the Hindu Paraiyars easily dispenses with such ceremonies.

On the other hand, the importance of Mariyamman as 'Lady of smallpox' is in no way diminished. Both Christians and Hindus assert that Mariyamman is the cause of smallpox. The Christians do not consider her to be similar to the other Hindu gods, that is to say a demon. She is greatly superior to the terrifying deities who live outside the village. Among the Hindu deities, she is the only one capable of living in a village. She is purer and less ferocious, even if, from time to time, she accepts animal sacrifices.

Dumont relates that Mariyamman is not only the Lady of smallpox, but also of all the other diseases. At Valghira Manickam, however, her role is strictly limited to smallpox, since it is Arockyai Mary who deals with the other diseases. We have seen that there is no possible confusion between the two goddesses since Mariyamman, although not bloodthirsty, is none the less awe-inspiring.

It is possible to ask Mariyamman what mood she is in: one simply places a earthenware pot, with a few seeds in it, in front of her temple. If Mariyamman is pleased, the seeds will germinate and grow to a good height. Otherwise this means that the goddess is angry and a *puja* has to be offered to her. The Paraiyars never celebrate this rite, which necessitates certain requirements of purity. None the less, Mariyamman's fury is taken seriously. Arockyam, a Christian, believes, for example, that his two children died of smallpox because he had not shown respect for Mariyamman. A young girl is lame for the same reason.

The 'Lady of Smallpox' is particularly sensitive about questions of ritual purity. It is true that she is less sensitive than the other Hindu deities, who are unable to tolerate the blood of a menstruating woman. None the less, a woman who has her periods is well-advised to keep a safe distance from Mariyamman's temple because she does not like 'dirty things'. If someone catches smallpox, it is necessary,

for example, to avoid relieving oneself. Some of the more orthodox Hindus state that she does not like to see them accepting food from Christians. She hates 'dirty' things like excrement, spittle, and 'dirty' people like menstruating women and 'dirty' places such as the ones where people go to relieve themselves. Arockyai Mary is not very preoccupied with questions of ritual pollution, and we shall see that she is more concerned with the moral order of the world.

It is because people do not respect the rules of purity or morality that they catch smallpox. It is thus clear that Mariyamman punishes people when they commit faults. Smallpox (*ammai*) is not simply a disease which is sent by the goddess, but it is the goddess herself who takes possession of the victim's body. When someone catches one of the different forms of smallpox, he will say, 'I have Mariata' or, 'I have Mariyamman'. It is she who takes possession of his body. As a result, it is strictly forbidden to swallow any kind of medicine and even more to receive any kind of injection. The fear of transgressing this rule is very great. Once, for example, a man was terrified by the idea that his sick child, who had been taken to see a doctor, might have caught smallpox. The only thing to be done in a case of smallpox is to go and see Selambaï, or another specialist in the matter. The person who is ill has to take rest on the veranda of his house, and avoid being in contact with impure things.

After three sessions with Selambaï, a *puja* to Mariyamman allows a definitive guarantee of being healed. If the illness is sufficiently serious, people can go so far as to offer a cock at the temple of Kottur Mariyamman. She is the only Hindu deity to whom Christians regularly offer worship. They have to respect her since she strikes those who show her disdain.

Apart from this, there is no real devotion to Mariyamman. The Hindus do not have the slightest idea of her origins, her legend, her character or her habits. No one was able to find a relationship between her and another deity apart from the *pusari,* who told me that she was none other that Parvati, Shiva's wife.

The Paraiyars of Chingleput seem to be much better theologians than those of Ramnad, who are also less Sanskritized. Moffatt has reported interesting myths (1979: 248-50) such as, for example, one which tells how Mariyamman is composed of the head of a Brahman on the body of a Chakkiliyan untouchable. This perhaps explains the ambivalent nature of Mariyamman, who receives animal sacrifices,

despite the fact that she is venerated by Brahmans. It also seems that Mariyamman is often associated with demonic possession. At Valghira Manickam, however, it is once again Arockyai Mary who has taken over this role from her.

While it is true that Mariyamman is indeed a village goddess, she seems to be very rarely a personal god. The Hindus venerate Arockyai Mary more. In brief, Mariyamman occupies an intermediate position between the minor gods and the great Brahmanic deities. She is not necessarily malevolent, but can strike the villagers with quite serious illnesses. She contrasts, in this respect, with the Virgin Mary, as also by the importance she attaches to ritual purity.

In conclusion, it becomes clear that the cult of the village goddess is only slightly institutionalized and not very collective. Relationships with the guardian, i.e. principally Arockyai Mary, are essentially individual. These two traits seem to characterize correctly religious observance at Valghira Manickam. Sociologically speaking, Arockyai Mary is in no way the object of collective worship on behalf of the Hindu community, even if she is the preferred deity of most of them.

4) Other Hindu Deities

We have seen that the great Sanskritic deities are, more or less, absent from Valghira Manickam's pantheon. People basically never address themselves to them, apart from a few, more orthodox families. People only visit them in the great temples, that is to say seldom. The Hindu Paraiyars claim to be Shaivites, but they do not know how they are distinguished from others, apart from the horizontal mark they make on their foreheads.

There are few religious marriages among the Hindus, just one odd isolated case. Pilgrimages are thus the sole opportunity for entering into contact with the Sanskritic gods, and a deity as popular as Ganesh, the elephant-headed son of Shiva, is not invoked in the village.

The vegetarian gods belong to the high castes. It must not be forgotten that, until recently, the Paraiyars were forbidden entry to the temples and, even today, they are not allowed in everywhere. None the less it is possible to expect that the importance of the great gods will continue to increase.

Three main deities are to be found at Valghira Manickam: Kâliamman, Karuppaya and Muni Iswaran, the latter being less popular.

Kâliamman and Karuppaya are sometimes called clan gods, but this role does not mean much.

Kâliamman is a pan-Indian goddess, a manifestation, as a destroyer, of Parvati, Shiva's consort. However, she is not represented anywhere in the village, where nobody is even capable of relating her to other deities. She is a part in the world of the terrible gods who haunt the surroundings of the village. These deities thus accomplish all the functions of demons and strike all those whom they encounter, or who offend them. They can none the less have a protective role, especially if a family has a particular veneration for them. For example, a girl said, 'Karuppaya stands at our door and protects the house'. But even so, their terrifying nature does not leave them.

Karuppaya, the black lord, is sometimes interpreted as a deification of darkness. He does not live in the village, but in lonely places, reservoirs and the thickets which separate inhabited areas. He often rules over armies of evil spirits. When the villagers go out at night to a lonely spot, they are afraid of the shadowy forms which suddenly loom up: it is Karuppaya or Muni who have come to strike them ... When night falls, the *munis* are particularly active, and a pregnant woman should not walk about alone at twilight. Kâliamman struck a young Pallar woman dead: she had gone out to cut wood while menstruating.

These gods seem to be hardly superior to demons, among whom they in fact live. There is no real dividing line between demons and inferior deities. Sociologically speaking, it thus seems that it is solely inferior deities, who are cruel and awe-inspiring, who rule over the inferior layers of the population. The Paraiyars, as we have said, have nothing to say about these gods. Only Kâlimuttu was able to relate the myth of Karuppaya:

> Karuppaya was playing with a Brahman baby. The child's father wanted to get the baby back, but the black god refused and, faced with the father's insistence, cut the child to pieces. The father then swore that the doors of the sanctuary would never again be opened and no Brahman would ever worship him again. This is how Karuppaya became the god of darkness.

It can be seen that Karuppaya is capable of tenderness, but his impatience is such that he becomes capable of the worst acts if he is vexed.

It should be noted that these deities seem to have a complete lack of interest in moral questions. They are particularly sensitive

about impurity, since they are carnivorous gods who love blood. Anything to do with reproduction incurs their wrath. They attack everything which is dirty (*suttamille*), or ritually impure (*tîttu*): an adulterer or a menstruating woman have to be on their guard against the wrath of Karuppaya and his kind.

The Christians never pray to these deities, whom they none the less fear. In one particular case, however, they make reference to Kâliamman: when an argument degenerates and becomes very serious, Kâliamman is taken as witness to the final rupture between the opponents. For example, Gnanapragasan, after a knife fight with his brother-in-law, went in front of the temple of Kâli and threw a handful of earth on the ground. A woman can do the same thing against her husband from whom she wants to separate. One then says to Kâli, 'If I am wrong, you must punish me, if I am right you must punish the other party.' Those who practise black magic, invoke Kâli before casting a spell on someone.

These gods are thus clearly in contrast with Arockyai Mary who protects everybody, including the scavengers despite the fact that they are constantly in contact with dirt. She heals sickness and drives out the demons who are sent by these terrifying deities.

5) The Saints

For the Catholics, saints are not to be neglected. In villages where the church has a patron saint, as is the case at Sebastianpatnam or Manamboyl, this saint occupies a fundamental place in the life of the village.

The saints (*punidaïr,* feminine: *punida*) are supernatural beings who have led extraordinary lives which were devoted principally to the propagation of religion. There is no real difference in nature between gods and saints; after all, Jesus and Mary also spent time on earth. We clearly rediscover here a tendency in Hinduism which encourages the deification of remarkable beings. The gods are more powerful than the saints. This explains why, at Sebastianpatnam, Saint Sebastian is considered to be a god. The saints enjoy powers which we, simple mortals, do not have.

The Paraiyars do not attribute particular functions to the different saints. If someone has lost something, he will not hurry to go and see Saint Anthony. A villager, to whom I explained this custom, told me philosophically that if people had lost something, it meant that they had been foolhardy or absent-minded and that Saint Anthony

had nothing to do with the matter. The most superstitious people are not always those whom one would think to be so. People pray to Mariyamman against smallpox and to Arockyai Mary for all the rest. Apart from this, people do not pray to the saints for particular reasons, except when they happen to be in their presence, i.e. in front of their statues, or in a church which is dedicated to them.

It suffices to look at the forenames of the villagers to realize that Arockyai Mary and Saint Sebastian are the most popular. After this comes Arulananda (the Tamil name for De Britto), the region's martyr, who was executed in the seventeenth century at Oryur, about 20 kilometres from the village. Saint Anthony and Saint Thomas, very popular in South India, are not greatly venerated here.

Father Léveil, a French missionary who died a few years ago, is regarded as a saint throughout the region and is venerated as such. He used to prepare sachets of herbs which people placed in the fields as an insecticide. He healed the blind simply by laying on hands and the day he died, the bells of Andaoorani, where he was parish priest, started to toll all by themselves, as he had predicted several years beforehand. The villagers comment that an ordinary man is not able to accomplish such things.

Generally speaking, saints are men who have suffered. Arulananda (De Britto) is a perfect illustration of this principle. The same is true of Saint Sebastian, who is depicted as being attached to a tree-trunk, his body riddled with arrows. A villager who originates from Sebastianpatnam explains, for example, that Saint Sebastian preached the Christian faith despite Hindu opposition and that he suffered martyrdom. Judas attached him to a dead tree which came back to life again as soon as the Saint was tied to it. His body was then pierced by seven arrows.

The saints are benevolent beings and are in contrast, once again, with the Hindu supernatural beings. In the villages where he is the patron saint of the church, Saint Sebastian protects the villagers and watches their acts. A Hindu prince was only freed of stomach pains after a prayer made to Saint Sebastian, and he built a chapel to him near Oryur.

At Valghira Manickam, the saints have a somewhat limited role. People know few stories about them and only their miracles merit the attention of the villagers. Our review of the supernatural beings of the village remains incomplete, since we still have to talk about

the *peys-pisasus* who, on the contrary, move around outside the village. We shall deal with them at the end of this chapter.

D) Metaphysics and Religious Concepts

1) Poverty and Suffering: The Foundations of the Symbolic System

Suffering is the very basis of Paraiyar ideology and the principal mode of communication with the gods. The world here below is just suffering, and we have to suffer, not only in order to expiate our sins, but also in order to obtain favours. Making a vow, which is perhaps the fundamental religious activity, is above all a punishment and by this fact it is also suffering.

Exchange not only characterizes relationships between human beings, it also characterizes the relationships between the gods and human beings. In order to obtain something from the gods, we have to give them something. The whole of the Paraiyars' religious life seems to be based on this principle, and suffering is the mode in which this exchange takes place. Heaven, or deliverance (*moksha*), is thus the end to suffering, but before getting there, we have to suffer.

The link between this ideology and the caste system is more complex than appears at first sight. It would be easy to show that the Paraiyars' caste situation is the result of their previous sins. I hesitate, however, in crossing this threshold. The Paraiyars never told me that the caste system was the work of God (on this point, see the myths of origin). It is rather their material condition which is often explained as an expiation for their sins. Being a Paraiyar is thus not in itself a punishment; it is the fact of being poor which is one.

The Paraiyars assert that suffering is the will of God, but it would be wrong to see in this a sign of fatalism. While the Paraiyars believe that suffering is the will of God, this does not stop them from wanting to escape from it.

2) Morality, Purity and Sin

It is not because God is particularly cruel that he inflicts suffering on mankind, but rather because there is an order to things and the universe which God created, and which has to be respected. Mankind constantly breaks these divine rules and in consequence man has to

pay for this. The gods are concerned with the smooth running of things and imposing sanctions for faults.

One can distinguish between ritual and moral order. By moral order, we mean the rules which govern the relationships between individuals, the rules which are considered to be valid, i.e. ethics. On the other hand, by ritual order, we mean the set of rules which concern the attitude which has to observed with respect to the world of the gods, and which is essentially characterized by the rules of purity and pollution. The gods watch over the upholding of these two orders. On the one hand, it is necessary to follow certain principles which allow us to live in society, for example, it is forbidden to steal. On the other hand, the gods also require us to avoid contact with impurity which they cannot endure. For example, a menstruating woman cannot go to draw water since this would show a lack of respect for the gods. Sometimes, these two orders come together, as in the case of adultery, which is both an attack against morality and a 'dirty' act (*suttamille*). For the Hindus, the gods watch over these two orders, even if they sometimes tend to be more sensitive to the ritual rather than to the moral aspect. The Christian 'gods', on the contrary, do not keep watch over what the Hindus do, and are little concerned with ritual order in general. The moral rules are the only obligations incumbent on the Christian Harijans. None the less, the latter do not escape from the susceptibilities of the Hindu gods and they have to respect these rules, as far as possible.

If one wanted to bring out the essential characteristic of the general rules which the Paraiyars have to follow, it would doubtless be the fact of being negative. Almost no form of behaviour is prescribed in the villagers' moral code. God requires few exemplary attitudes or remarkable traits of character. It is not expected that somebody should shine because of his qualities, but rather that he should conform to the rules and traditions. It is perhaps this weakness in the notion of the individual which explains the negative character of the moral code, which seems to content itself with forbidding: one must not steal, one must not be 'dirty', one should not go out during menstruation, one must not be bad towards others ... Even the saints, as we have seen, have few qualities which are underlined: what their lives bring out is the fact that they have suffered.

The Paraiyars do not seem to be terrified by the idea of divine punishment. The sins they claim to be the most serious are also those

which they shamelessly commit. For example, they never go to Sunday mass, though they stress its obligatory nature. Women never live in seclusion during menstruation despite the risks they claim to run. It is true that the Paraiyars are not really afraid of going to hell, since they believe they are there already. Life could hardly be more difficult for them and this perhaps explains their comparative unconcern.

It is necessary to expiate the faults which we commit. However, this expiation does not necessarily take place after death; amends have to be made in this life for many faults. Illness, especially chronic headaches or stomach-aches, or more serious illnesses such as leprosy, are punishments which are imposed in atonement for moral faults. On the other hand, if we sin through impurity, it is possession by evil spirits which we risk. If one does something bad, one has to pay for it. One cannot be a thief and lead a happy life: for example, a dishonest cart-driver was stricken with leprosy. If someone does not pay back a debt to a friend, he is threatened with the fact that he will have to pay back later in front of Arockyai Mary. Illness—and principally an illness against which 'doctors are powerless'—is thus the punishment *par excellence.*

Despite the essentially negative character of their moral code, the Paraiyars acknowledge that good actions (*punyam*) guarantee us a better afterlife. They have, however, a lack of imagination on this subject. Leading a good life means, 'not being a sinner, not doing wrong'. If one avoids committing too many sins (*pâvams*), then one's life is already respectable. A real sinner is someone who steals his brother's property, who has sexual relationships before marriage, or outside it, who commits rape or who does wrong to others. Murder is seldom cited as a sin, perhaps because no murders are committed in the village. If someone commits a murder, then it means that he has good reasons for doing so, a question of honour for example, and it is not the guilt of the murderer which is pinpointed by the Paraiyars.

The Paraiyars also have to conform to a ritual order in order not to offend the gods. Only the Hindu gods, as we have seen, are concerned about this order. Generally speaking, however, the Paraiyars, be they Hindu or Christian, are relatively little concerned about questions of purity: women go out despite menstruation and rules of commensality are not greatly observed.

Purity does not mean being clean. A woman can be *tîttu* (*impure*) and yet clean (*suttam*), even if impurity is often expressed in terms of hygiene. Impurity is a state of varying length which has to be got over. Life and reproductive cycles particularly lend themselves to impurity. Each stage of these cycles starts with a certain kind of impurity: after childbirth, the mother has to remain sixteen to thirty days confined to a hut, and avoid any contact with food, utensils and even people. In the same fashion, when a girl has her first menstruation, she has to remain apart, in a corner of the veranda, for seven days. Sexual intercourse is, in itself, a source of impurity and one has to wash oneself immediately afterwards. Finally, death results in a period of pollution which lasts sixteen days for the close relatives. At the end of each of these periods, there is a ceremony, usually a ritual bath and change of clothes, which marks the end of pollution.

It is another matter to say that these ceremonies are respected by the Paraiyars since, for the villagers, actions are far removed from principles. The ceremony of the first menstruation is universally celebrated and thus takes on remarkable importance. This, however, is the limit of the Paraiyars' ritual rigour. The other ceremonies are neglected or dispatched with a few gestures and without much conviction. Women cook, work, go to draw water and live normal lives during menstruation. After childbirth, few ceremonies are celebrated.

There is therefore a clear difference between the high and the low castes, as far as the observance of the rules of pollution is concerned: Brahmans, for example, are obsessed with questions of ritual purity. The Paraiyars do not apply these rules to which they do not attach any real religious value. In everyday language, they are explained by practical reasons: for example, people say that the mother's seclusion after childbirth is intended to force her to rest. Again, people say that the sixteen days of mourning are necessary before the final ceremony in order to allow far-off relatives to be present. There is, hence, no insistence on ritual pollution, even if people acknowledge the risk of incurring the wrath of the gods.

3) Divine Punishment

Bad actions are punished in two ways: on the one hand, the gods take sanctions on us directly by inflicting on us illness or demonic possession; on the other hand, our acts are reckoned up after our death and influence our afterlife. We shall deal with the first form of punishment in this section, and analyse the second in the next.

For the Christians, the Hindu deities play the role of demons. Arockyai Mary, on the other hand, never does any harm to anybody. However, if we disappoint her, she will allow the Hindu gods to act as they choose. The 'Christian gods' do not get angry because of questions of ritual purity, which is principally the concern of the Hindu gods. It is possession which is the main punishment for questions of impurity.

For the villagers, most illnesses are thus caused by the gods and appear as the consequence of our bad acts. It would be wrong to see in this belief mere superstition which sets itself up as an obstacle to modern medicine. On the contrary, it in no way stops the Paraiyars from going to see a doctor, who can do no harm (except, as we have seen, in the case of smallpox). None the less, the Paraiyars observe that, in a certain number of cases, the doctors are unable to heal the illness. People are then sure that it is a case of divine punishment. Nothing stops the patient from continuing to consult doctors, but it will be hopeless. Sick people who undertake pilgrimages have almost always been in medical hands. It may be seen that the Paraiyars' attitude on this point is not basically different from that of Westerners. Since they hardly have the means to pay for efficient medical treatment, they simply have recourse more rapidly to divine mercy, whereas sick people in the West only go to Lourdes, for example, in really serious cases.

4) Death and After

Man is made up of two separate parts: the body (*udambi*) and the soul or spirit (*âvi*). The *âvi* is what allows us to speak, to smell, to walk, to work; it is the difference between a dead body and a living man. Without the *âvi,* the body is worthless. The two constituent entities of mankind are detachable: death is the separation between body and soul. The *âvi* then goes away, leaves the body, which is left behind and is buried before it rots. What happens to the *âvi* is more problematical, and depends principally on the will of God.

On this point, the Hindus are vaguer than ever, and they often get out of the problem by saying that God alone knows what happens after death. Others do not shy away from confusion and assert, for example, that a living person can be reincarnated in another. All this tends to demonstrate that the Paraiyars have not mastered the Brahmanic theory of metempsychosis. They claim to be ignorant of what happens after death and do not greatly worry about it. This lack of

interest is also found among the Christians, for whom the most common theory is that our life on earth is hell and so nothing worse could happen to us.

The Hindus also believe in heaven and hell, but are unable to make a link between this belief and the belief in the transmigration of souls. For the Christians, everybody can have access to heaven, a point which is not in fact questioned by the Hindus. Everything depends on the ledger and our good actions, on our karma. If we have led exemplary lives, which is very rarely the case, we can become 'servants of God' (*adiargal*) in heaven (*moksha*).

Those who have nothing wrong on their conscience thus go to heaven, behind a splendid door which opens up in the air. There they lead agreeable lives in comfort. Everything is calm, days are spent doing nothing, apart from making conversation with friends. One can go to mass the whole day long. Milk and fruit are handed out and people do not have to work. There are no punishments and people do not have to worry about finding food.

On the other hand, if the balance sheet of our acts is negative, the *âvi* does not gain access to heaven and two solutions are possible: either the *âvi* can be cast into hell (*naragam*), or it can be reincarnated on earth, which, after all, is not greatly different. It all depends on the gravity of the faults which still have to be atoned for, and on the will of God. Very fortunately, everybody ends up in heaven and this gives Paraiyar metaphysics an ultimately rather optimistic nature. Suffering will finally come to an end.

Hell is the worst punishment and life there is atrocious. There is fire, and people are thrown into cages full of serpents. While heaven is up above, hell is in the entrails of the earth. Those who have committed rape are cast there first. The *âvis* have to suffer there, work hard among the evil spirits and carry stones on their heads.

The Paraiyars have never heard of purgatory. On the other hand, they esteem that God can decide to send us back to earth. Here as well, life is made up of suffering and, 'we have to carry stones on our heads'.

Fortunately, everybody finally ends up in heaven. In the meantime, suffering is the common lot of all people. Sometimes, however, suffering is too painful, in which case it is necessary to beseech the mercy of the gods. This is what we shall now look at.

E) The Exchange Between Gods and Men

1) Prayer as Petition

For the Paraiyars, all social relationships have to be based on reciprocity and the same is true of their relationships with the supernatural world. There is no point in praying except for a precise reason, that is to say in order to obtain something in exchange.

Observers have often underlined the pragmatic nature of the untouchables' religion. This point of view does not seem false to me and it is not an exaggeration to say that the essential element of the Paraiyars' religious life consists in making attempts to obtain some kind of advantage from the gods.

The Paraiyars' fervour expresses itself only under precise conditions. People do not address themselves to God, except in need, when they lack something. The Paraiyars hope to obtain from the gods what they have been unable to have in this world. As we have said, the untouchables of the region do not go to Sunday mass regularly; their piety is only aroused if there is a problem. They are then to be found in the middle of the church, on their knees, with their arms outspread in fervent devotion.

The 'Hail Mary' and 'Our Father' prayers are unknown to the villagers who prefer precise requests. In most cases, though not always, people address themselves to Arockyai Mary.

Prayer is above all a request, and in order to respect the rule of reciprocity, this request is often accompanied by a promise, which is often a vow, or, more seldom, a sacrifice. Prayer thus defines a relationship of exchange with the supernatural world: a favour is asked for in exchange for suffering. Vows constitute the bills of exchange for divine favour. Practically speaking, prayer never takes place without a vow.

The Paraiyars' religion thus takes on a pragmatic character: one cannot receive without paying back and the vow is an essential institution.

2) The Vow: The Religious Act Par Excellence

A vow expresses reciprocity. The Tamil term *nêrttikadan* clearly expresses this aspect of the vow (*kadan,* loan, and *nêrtti,* prayer), and it means that a vow is a prayer when a loan is made. It is a sort of payment for favours received, even if the payment is anticipated. Vows constitute, of course, an extremely common observance in all

the castes of Tamil Nadu, but among the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam, they constitute the essential element of religious life.

The gods are merciful. They can indeed give, but mankind has to give something in exchange, and there is hardly any other kind of religious act. The Bhajans, songs of worship, which are very common in India are totally unknown here. On the other hand, every family has a debt towards the gods and always has to finish accomplishing the realization of a vow made in the past.

Sacrifices can be interpreted as being a particular form of vow where the offering is essentially physical, whether in the form of an animal or not. None the less, sacrifices are not very popular in the village as such. A goat is from time to time killed, but this is in no way a ritual act. This takes place, in fact, because a pilgrim can offer a goat to the villagers by way of thanks for a service rendered by Our Lady.

Such meals are frequently organized in the village. Rice, curry and meat are prepared by a group of people, after a member of the family has been healed. Such meals are essentially just expenditure. The food is in no way considered to be a *prasadam* or food for the gods. The aim is to deprive oneself of something, i.e. a kind of suffering.

Physical suffering is a quite common type of vow, probably because the Paraiyars basically only own their bodies. Most of the villagers do not have the means to pay for a goat or some other sumptuous present. Physical suffering is a way of coming closer to God. This is how the villagers explain the shaving off of their hair, when making a vow:

> We shave our heads in order to appear ugly and humble before God. In this way, he will help us to solve our problems. It is beauty and attractiveness that are offered to God. There is a Tamil proverb which says: God gave you the world and you only have your hair to give him. This shows the mercy of God.

If a woman falls ill, she can offer her hair to God in order to appear ugly and humble. It should be remembered that in India, the head is the symbol of purity and intelligence. A legend tells, for example, that Brahmans were fashioned out of the head of the first man, the Shudras out of his feet. Voluntarily rendering oneself deformed or ugly is thus a remarkable form of abasement.

Shaving of the head is generally accompanied by another form of offering, but what is important is that one should suffer. This is what a Christian woman told us, for example:

> When we are suffering about something, it is because it is the will of God. So, if we want to make this suffering stop, we have to suffer in another way.

Thus if someone has a pain in his foot or in his hand, he can buy a bronze or silver plaque, or a representation of a foot or hand, and offer it to the sanctuary. Suffering is provoked in order to get rid of another particularly intolerable kind of suffering, by a sort of sympathetic process. The new suffering is deliberate and results from the free choice of the person concerned, but it has to be endured to the end, otherwise God can become angry. One cannot receive without giving in return. A young woman had promised to offer her hair at Velankanni, if she became pregnant. Having had a son, she did not worry any longer about her vow and the baby died a short time afterwards. God does not act in this way out of cruelty, it is we who ask to suffer and he is simply replying to our request.

The promises made in vows are of various kinds. We have already come across the most common of them: shaving of the head, the gift of a meal by better-off people, or an offering. There are also more spectacular forms of penitence: exposing oneself to full sunlight, sitting down and standing up hundreds of times, rolling one's body round the sanctuary are all practices which are to be found in the exorcisms of people who are possessed by evil spirits. The religious festival is a propitious time for the realization of vows. Some give money, a flag, decorations, flowers, fruits, etc. each year. Susse, for example, keeps a lantern lit during the whole week which precedes the festival. There is another custom which takes place during the festival: if a family wishes to make a vow, they buy a sugar-cane plant and hire a drum and several flags. They then walk about in procession around the village to the sound of the drum and carrying the banners and the sugar-cane plant. At great festivals, as at Oryur, tens of families can be seen walking round the village to the sound of drums.

This ceremony is probably to be connected with the importance of circumambulation in Tamil rites. For example, there are always people who walk around the sanctuary in prayer, always in a clock-

wise direction. People also get themselves rolled round the sanctuary, or walk on their knees or on all fours.

Pilgrimages are also, of course, another privileged moment for realizing vows and appear as super-vows. Each family always has to accomplish a pilgrimage, unless they have just made one.

For the Paraiyars, walking is the best means of making a pilgrimage since, as one may guess, it is a form of suffering. To go to Velankanni, it takes several days since the distance to be covered is 150 kilometres. Since the villagers usually walk barefoot, they get there with bleeding feet. It is important to note that in most cases it is families who make pilgrimages and rarely individuals alone.

Suffering is an essential element of pilgrimage. For example, Aloysius had suffered for several years from serious stomach-aches. He promised to go to Velankanni with his family. As he walked, Aloysius' pains progressively lessened and completely disappeared when he got to Velankanni. This story shows how pain can be transformed from a permanent to a temporary state. This transference of suffering is one of the essential ways in which vows operate. There are probably about a hundred villagers who make a pilgrimage each year and this shows their importance in the life of the village.

F) The Festival of Arockyai Mary

The festival (*tiruvalla*) is the most outstanding event in the life of the village. It is on this occasion that the village best demonstrates its unity. The festival takes place at the end of September and is dedicated to Our Lady of Good Health, but is also the festival of the Catholic community of Valghira Manickam.

The period which precedes the village festival is a time of constant arguments. Every family has to give a sum of 10 rupees as a tax for the festival. The collection of this tax inevitably results in numerous problems, such as accusations of theft. Old and young, as we have seen, do not hesitate to come into conflict on the slightest of pretexts.

A week before the festival, a banner is symbolically raised in the middle of the village. It indicates that the village is ready for the festival. From that day on, a mass is celebrated in the village every evening. Loudspeakers play blaring film music, the whole day long, in order for the whole area to know that the festival is being prepared. Each evening, the children of the village also march down all the streets of the village, sporting flags while one of them rings a gong

at the head of the procession. As we have said, from the time that the flag is raised, all the villagers are supposed to be in the village and nobody can spend a night outside of the village. The Hindu Paraiyars and the Pallars are not tied down by this obligation.

This week is also a source of worry: everybody asks themselves how they are going to be able to manage to receive their guests, 'who only come to eat'. Some take the opportunity to borrow money. The exaggerations and boasting about the magnificence of the festival gradually give way to a sharp pessimism, as the days go by. The young accuse the old of all the problems which they feel are coming. They are sure now that there are going to be much fewer people than in the other years.

On the day of the festival itself, however, all the fears and arguments are overcome by renewed joy and pride. The village is full of colour. Bands of musicians play in the sanctuary, pedlars display candles, bracelets, fruits and sweetmeats to the passers-by. The houses which give public meals have floods of people from all sides.

The procession (*sapram*) is the highlight of the day. The statues of Saint Sebastian, Saint Anthony, Saint Joseph ('Soussai' for Tamils) and Arockyai Mary, all mounted on palanquins, are carried around the village with a din of music, bands, crackers and prayers. Only the men of the village can carry the statue, while hundreds of people, who have come from everywhere, follow the procession in prayer. The Hindu Paraiyars and the Pallars help the Christians to carry the statues. A fireworks display with an illumination of the words *Mariai Valgai,* 'Praised be Mary', ends the procession.

The night ends with a play, with hundreds of spectators. The next morning, the statues are again carried round the village, but this time only in the presence of the villagers; as they pass by, the women throw rice on the statues. The whole day is then spent in games like *kôlatham,* a kind of simulated combat between two men armed with big sticks, or *kabbadi,* the most popular village game in South India. At the end of the day, the men get drunk in order to celebrate the event. Everybody is happy, especially the children for whom the festival is a source of great joy.

Village solidarity thus clearly culminates in the festival of the Virgin Mary. This festival represents the sole opportunity for the villagers to work together and forget their quarrels. At the end of the festival, they all seem joyful to see that everything went off well and

everybody hopes, but in vain, that the village will be able to maintain this fine unity.

G) Spirits and Possession

We now know that possession is the punishment *par excellence* for those who commit faults in the domain of ritual purity and sexuality. The world of demons is, however, complex and merits a few pages of study.

We have spoken relatively little about evil spirits, *peys* or *peys-pisasus,* who are at the bottom of the hierarchy of spiritual beings, but who occupy an important place in the life of the villagers. They are omnipresent and always ready to strike.

The *peys* are distinguished from the other supernatural beings by their human origins. While the saints are supernatural beings whose origins are people who have lived well, the *peys* are those who have led lives which were unhappy, failed and incomplete. They have a sort of grudge against their human brethren. Normally, a man has to live a certain number of years fixed by Kadaül or Brahmâ. This is our destiny and we necessarily have to live for a certain number of years. However, in certain cases, a person can die before this period has expired. This is principally so in cases of violent death: suicides, accidents and murders. The *âvis* of people who die in this way have to live for a certain number of years as *peys-pisasus,* until the normal end of their lives. They are condemned to haunt the air and vex mankind. They are also used by the Hindu gods to punish humans. They enter the bodies of human beings and provoke all kinds of afflictions which stop them from leading normal lives.

A few examples will help to illustrate the presence of the *peys*. A lorry driver died in a road accident. A pregnant woman passed by the place where the accident had taken place, a short time afterwards, and heard a terrifying voice. She had fever for four days and then died of it. The place where the accident took place is particularly feared since then. A young man from the village who was working in the evening, at Madras, heard horrible noises; an hour later he vomited blood and expired during the night.

It is dangerous to leave inhabited areas and venture out near bridges, rivers, reservoirs and *ooranis,* where evil sprits often gather. For example, a young woman who went to wash alone was possessed by the spirit of a young man who had committed suicide after a

family quarrel. For a woman who is pregnant, or in menstruation, going out like this can be an act of suicide. These examples, unlike what the villagers assert, tend to show that it is not only sinners who are possessed; it is sometimes sufficient for a spirit to find a young woman beautiful in order to possess her.

The *peys* can also take on a human form. Their distinctive mark is the fact that their feet do not touch the ground when they move around. They can also keep their own character, like the case of a woman, who was possessed by the spirit of a gypsy, and who started to dance when she fell into a trance. A *pey* can also harass someone, and several houses were abandoned for this reason; it was the case of a young woman who was constantly harassed by the *âvi* of her mother-in-law. Together with the *peys-pisasus,* there are also the *boudams* who haunt houses. They are evil spirits who are servants of Kâliamman and who invade huts from time to time and make them uninhabitable.

The villagers assert that a male spirit will have a tendency to possess a woman and vice versa. This rule seems to me, however, to be problematical, and I have observed young women possessed by female spirits. We shall see that, among other things, women are more frequently possessed than men.

Spirits like to possess people. Once inside someone's body, they are happy there and it is not easy to dislodge them. The spirit has to be beaten and made to suffer before deigning to leave its victim. This is why a punishment is inflicted by Arockyai Mary. The *pey* can then be heard to cry, 'It hurts! Leave me alone! I will not go away!' Sometimes it asks for alcohol or cigarettes before leaving. When, finally, the victim is delivered from the spirit, a tuft of his hair is taken and nailed to a tree. It is said that the evil spirit is neutralized in the tree. One person can, however, be possessed by several sprits at a time. Finally, the case of a married woman with children who is possessed is much less serious than the case of a young girl who is possessed. In the latter case, the *peys* do not easily release their victims, since they are the only ones to possess them.

Spirits like to live together in groups, for example around a source of water or an isolated tree. There are hundreds of spirits who live like this on the outskirts of the village. At the head of each of these groups is a spirit who is called a *muni.* This is an older and more violent spirit. If a case of possession is really hard to cure, then it

is suspected that it is caused by a *muni.* The *munis* are superior to the other spirits: if a *muni* starts to speak in the sanctuary, the sprits which possess the other women present will not show themselves, out of respect.

The *munis* are themselves subordinate to the Hindu deities. Without the protection of the guardian of the village, the spirits would strike everybody. If someone commits serious faults, he runs the risk of losing this protection, just as a woman who ventures out alone far from the village does. This brings us to the question who are the victims of possession.

It seems to me that there are two principal cases. Firstly, if one commits a serious fault in matters of purity, then the chances are high of being possessed. For example, a man who goes out, without having washed after sexual intercourse, will expose himself to the anger of the Hindu gods. The same is true of a woman who goes out to gather wood when she is menstruating. Moral faults seem to me to be rarely the reason for possession, apart from adultery, but, as we have seen, this is also a case of ritual fault. A pregnant woman who walks at nightfall outside the village commits no moral infringement, but she violates ritual order. It is also said that she particularly stirs up the female *âvis* who are envious of the baby. A young woman was possessed during her first menstruation and has never been delivered since. A woman who is possessed cannot become pregnant. I was also told that very young girls become possessed nowadays because, at present, girls menstruate younger and younger. I do not know if this information is true, but it underlines the link which exists between menstruation and possession. A woman who has a very irregular menstrual cycle is suspected of being possessed. Another example: there was a young woman in the sanctuary who was sure of being possessed, the only symptom being constant losses of blood.

The Christians claim to be particularly vulnerable to possession because of impurity. We have seen that women go out, work and cook while in menstruation, all of which arouses the Hindu gods. In addition, they never pray to these gods and thus do not appease their wrath. However, in my opinion, these assertions are theoretical, since the Hindus do not respect these rules of purity any more than the Christians.

Women are more susceptible to being possessed than men. The reason for this inequality is not the greater propensity of women to sin, but their greater participation in the reproductive cycle. Men only have a sporadic role in this cycle. It is sufficient for them to wash themselves after sexual intercourse in order to efface any trace of pollution, while women, because of menstruation, pregnancies and childbirth, are more exposed than men. As Reiniche (1981: 28) correctly observes:

> Women, animals and untouchables implicitly have something in common which is positive for prosperity and fecundity in general, and ambiguous as far as the ideal of purity and its code of rules are concerned.

An untouchable woman is thus doubly impure. The fact that she is highly implicated in the reproductive cycle is also the source of her greater susceptibility to possession. Her menstrual cycles, like her pregnancies, attract evil spirits, be they male or female, whereas the possession of a man by a male spirit seems to me improbable.

It does happen that men are possessed, but to a much lesser extent than women. The examples of males being possessed, which I encountered or which were related to me were, in fact, never very clear. In most cases it was a question of mental illness with symptoms different from those of possession. Sometimes it was more a case of laziness than possession, like the case of a Pallar who was not averse to taking rest in the sanctuary.

As we have said, possession hampers the reproductive cycle. It is believed that a woman who loses her children in infancy can have this kind of problems. In this context, the cases encountered were not very clear either and some villagers explained to me that certain women had gone mad with grief after the death of one, or several, babies. These women displayed symptoms of nervous breakdown rather than symptoms of possession. They were a really piteous sight and were in a permanent state of possession, unlike women who are possessed and who can behave normally when they are not in a fit of possession.

Men who are victims of black magic can attain even worse states. They go completely mad and are attached to trees with heavy chains since they can become dangerous or run away. A young Brahman

student was struck with black magic by his jealous fellow-students and he went mad. Another man was bewitched by his wife.

These rather striking examples bring us to the second possible type of possession. It should be remembered that, according to the first idea developed above, the villagers are mainly possessed because of having infringed the rules of purity. But in certain cases, the Paraiyars can be possessed without having committed any fault. It is this second possibility which we shall briefly examine now. It can happen that a peaceful villager has the misfortune of being attacked by an evil spirit. I was told, for example, of the case of a baby who was possessed, and I saw a young girl being possessed as she was leading the cows out to graze. We have also seen that a spirit can also be attracted by a pretty girl. Sebastian's wife was possessed by the spirit of a neighbour who had died after an abortion. It is doubtless because of these constant dangers that people keep relics or amulets in certain places, especially above entrance doors, in order to ward off evil spirits. Pilgrims bring back from Oryur red earth (according to the legend, it is red because of the martyred De Britto's blood) which is hung in a sachet from the lintel of the door. People also recuperate the mango leaves which decorate the village festival's flagpole for the same reason. Men sometimes wear small cylinders containing mantras attached to their arms.

Possession is not a permanent state; even though it is true that people can die because of this. Most cases are however cured, and it is the healing process which we shall now look at. Different symptoms prove that someone is possessed. Generally speaking, such people are unable to work. They feel dejected because the spirit devours their energy. But the harm can be greater. For example, the spirit of someone who committed suicide because of constant stomach-aches is likely to inflict similar pains on its victims.

Apart from such pains, someone who is possessed shows other characteristics: they seem to have more or less gone mad and say incomprehensible words. They can also display peculiar attitudes or start to laugh stupidly without reason. For example, a young girl made roaring noises coming from her stomach, similar to belching. The most striking aspect of possession remains, however, the fact that the various symptoms are not permanent. They regularly reappear, but the rest of the time, those who are possessed can appear to be quite normal. We often asked women, for various reasons, if they

were possessed; there is no shame or taboo about this subject, and women who are possessed are no different from all the others, except when they have a fit. Cases of possession are in fact very frequent.

The principal characteristic of a woman who is possessed is the trances which come over her at regular intervals. If a woman displays several suspicious symptoms, she is sent for several days to the sanctuary. She then stays there all the time, including at night. If nothing happens after a few days, she goes back home, but in many cases the woman falls into a trance in front of the statue of the Virgin. One is then certain that she is possessed, and she has to stay in the sanctuary until she is healed; this can take several months.

Some villagers assert that a woman can fall into a trance anywhere, but this assertion is not brought out by my observations, since all the cases of trance which I noted took place in the sanctuary. Trances are the means by which a spirit or a god manifests himself: we have seen that Mariyamman speaks in this way through Selambaï, and Karuppaya uses Kâliappan in the same fashion. Exteriorly, a trance always manifests itself in the same way: the woman sits on her heels, or is on her knees, and her head starts to turn slowly during a few minutes. The movement can then gradually become faster, and finally her head traces out large circles and her hair becomes untied. She soon screams, 'Mattave! Mattave!' In the end, it is the whole of her trunk which makes large circles, while her head accelerates the movement even more.

This can last for quite some time. When she has calmed down, the woman collapses on the ground, either worn out, or the spirit starts speaking while her head still oscillates slightly. The old catechist then questions the spirit, and the following kind of conversation can be heard (the *pey* and the woman speak through the woman's mouth):

The pey: I have stomach-ache.
The woman: The spirit has been within me for such a long time, please make it leave. He said that he liked me and that he wanted to stay in me. I have prayed so hard, it is now so long that he has been in me. Please, Matta, drive him out, I beg you, deliver me, Oh Mother.
The pey: I had a quarrel with my family and I drank poison in order to die. I did not want to leave the village and so I roamed around in the air round about it. One day I went near by a well where a young girl was

washing herself. I found her so beautiful that I possessed her. There are 500 houses in the village and there are 500 spirits who walk with me.
The old catechist: Why did you take poison?
The pey: Because of a quarrel.
The old catechist: Were you married?
The pey: No, I was a bachelor.
The old catechist: What is your caste?
The pey: I am a Christian Udayar.
The woman: I cannot live with my husband because of this spirit. He wants to divorce me. I was born in a rich household, of high caste. My family is rich, all my parents are rich, nobody has ever been possessed and everybody despises me because of this spirit. My husband no longer wants to live with me. My parents no longer want to live in my house. I beg you, deliver me! My husband will abandon me on the road, if you do not remove this burden. I will do everything you ask me to do.
The pey: I do not want to leave her, I want to stay with her. I like her, where else can I go?

These conversations can continue like this. Sometimes, Arockyai Mary can intervene, always through the woman's mouth, but usually, it is the old catechist who makes the woman speak. The object is essentially to discover all the circumstances of the possession. The villagers insist on the importance of this information. The circumstances allow the 'punishment' to be determined, it has to inflicted, not on the person who is possessed, but on the spirit in order for him to leave the person who is possessed.

The *pey* often hangs on, despite the pain of the punishment which is inflicted on him. During the trances, he can often be heard to say that he cannot stand it any longer, that it hurts too much, etc. When the final punishment takes place, the pain is so great that he leaves the woman's body. There are several types of punishment, but some of them often recur. Among the most common may be noted, for example, rolling the person's body round the sanctuary dozens of times, sitting and standing 2,000 times, making the sign of the cross on the ground with one's nose 2,000 times, receiving hundreds of blows on the head with a sandal, a broom or a *nîm* branch, remaining standing for hours in full sunlight, etc. Somebody always remains present in order to make sure that the punishment is carried out; most often it is the old catechist.

When the *pey* can no longer stand the pain, he at last leaves his victim's body. Sometimes, this does not mean that the exorcism is

over, since several *peys* can have lodged themselves in the victim's body. In general, the spirit himself announces the day he has chosen to leave the victim. A final rite is then necessary: a lock of the person's hair is torn off and nailed to a tree.

This custom constitutes the essential element of Hindu exorcism, but I was not able to participate in it because Kâliappan exercises his talents outside the village, and because the Hindus from the village have trust in Arockyai Mary when they are possessed. Among the Hindus, the sorcerer plays an essential part in the operation by changing himself into a deity, while among the Christians, the catechist's role is accessory. This difference put aside, Hindu exorcisms are very similar and the spirit also has to speak, and fix the date of his departure.

Possession occupies an important place in the life of the Paraiyars. There are always a lot of women in the sanctuary, including inhabitants of the village. The danger is thus a permanent one. A rather remarkable fact is that nobody ever makes a vow in order to be delivered from an evil spirit. The pain which the spirit makes the person endure is probably sufficient in itself. The important place occupied by possession underlines the proximity of the untouchables to the world of demons, who live on the outskirts of their villages. The great gods would never venture out into such impure and dangerous places.

H) Conclusion

In the course of this chapter, we have discovered again the 'marginalization' which characterizes the untouchables in other domains. The Christians are so badly integrated into their Church that they are hardly any different from their Hindu brethren. Without Arockyai Mary, everything would be chaos and darkness, the village would be left in the hands of the terrifying demons which surround the village.

The Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam are not very religious, or at any rate they are not formalists. In the final analysis, they are not greatly concerned about these supernatural beings. They only address themselves to them in case of need, and their worship makes one think of a system of public welfare. The Paraiyars do not really know what they believe, nor if they really do believe. Religion, heaven, hell, death, God himself, are simply words. Arockyai Mary, who is

a mother to all of them, is the only thing which has any importance for their lives. Is she not Our Lady of the poor?

The Catholics did not wait for the Vatican II Council to demonstrate their ecumenism. They have modelled their beliefs and worship on those of the Hindus. Here religion unites more than it divides, even if History has often sadly contradicted this principle.

7. General Conclusion

During the course of this study, we have seen that there is a difference between the high castes and the untouchables. The main aim of this study is to show that the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam are not permeated by the hierarchy which characterizes all of Indian society. To be sure, one cannot speak of an egalitarian ideology, as far as the Paraiyars are concerned, since they do not oppose an ideology to the hierarchy of the system, but they content themselves with maintaining among themselves an equality between individuals. The 'fragmentation' which results from this is accompanied by an absence of authority and laxity in beliefs and observances. These points appear clearly throughout this study and in all aspects of the Paraiyars' social life.

A monograph like this one inevitably brings with it certain problems which I would like to touch on briefly here. First of all, there is the question of the representative nature of the findings. Are the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam, above all, Paraiyars or are they untouchables, Tamils or even Indians? Doubtless, fieldwork is always somewhat short-sighted. It certainly has a tendency to put the accent on the originality of a village rather than its 'national' nature. In addition, the anthropologist cannot be everywhere at the same time, and what he sometimes believes to be a specific characteristic of the village can be found again somewhere else between the Himalayas and Cape Comorin. Inversely, he can be tempted to draw too general conclusions from particular facts. Today, anthropologists are wary of discovering general laws concerning the functioning of human societies (see, on this subject, Evans-Pritchard 1962), none the less they cannot content themselves with being mere 'social photographers' and, in this precise case, it is legitimate to ask oneself if the discoveries remain valid outside the borders of the village.

There is no easy reply to this question since documentation is not abundant on this point. At first sight, Moffatt's research seems to be opposed to the views upheld in this study. But as we know, we should not trust appearances since, as we stressed in the introduction, there is more complementarity than opposition with Moffatt and I am, for example, completely in agreement with the view that the Harijans are incapable of proposing an alternative to the caste system. On the other hand, we have insisted on the fact that the untouchables do not have their own ideology and that their internal 'egalitarianism' is in fact the very corollary of their acceptance of the external hierarchy. This assertion, which is confirmed in certain cases (see Parry 1979), is not applicable to the society of Valghira Manickam. In the same fashion, the acceptance of a social hierarchy does not *necessarily* imply its application to all social relationships. The distance between men and women, between parents and children, between old and young also seems much less marked among the untouchables than, for example, among the orthodox Brahmans. To summarize: the *general characteristics* of Paraiyar society should, to my way of thinking, be capable of being found again among many other untouchable castes, and other studies will add to the many elements which already lead in this direction and which underline the 'heterodoxy' of the untouchables. It remains true, however, as Srinivas correctly showed in Coorg (1965), that each caste is a mixture of specific elements both regional and national. Thus the Paraiyars are, at the same time, Paraiyars, Tamils and Indians, but it is possible to bring out traits which one should be able to discover again among most of the untouchables of India.

Some scholars will not fail to point out that castes like the Santâmi Chamars strongly resemble the high castes (see Briggs 1920). Does this not, however, bring up the second social problem posed by village monographs and which concerns social change? Fieldwork takes place over a limited period of time, and one of the grave mistakes of functionalist anthropologists has been to consider as functional certain facts which were recent acquisitions. More generally: here again the anthropologist must try and avoid being a mere 'social photographer' who brings out his camera at a given moment in time while neglecting history and the transformations of the society he is studying. There is in India a process of social change, which the Indian anthropologist Srinivas (1971) has called Sanskritization, whereby an inferior caste borrows the practices and customs of the

high castes in order to improve its social status. For a century now, this process has greatly accelerated since, on the one hand, there were no longer any legal sanctions upholding the prohibitions which were incumbent on the untouchables and, on the other hand, the untouchables at last saw new economic opportunities opening up to them which allowed them to free themselves from the yoke of the high castes. In consequence, certain castes are today heavily Sanskritized and thus cannot be taken into consideration as being characteristic of the untouchables in general. I have not systematically dealt with the question of social change in this book, although it occupies a quite important place in it. We have seen that the most important changes are above all economic ones. The Paraiyars live today in a monetary system, and have become 'free workers' who thus only possess their strength to work. Social changes seem to me, however, to be much more limited. To be sure, dependence on the Kallars has been considerably weakened, but the Paraiyars have not lost their untouchable character for the Kallars in spite of this, and they appear to me to be only slightly Sanskritized. In this context, it is important to note that the younger generation seems much more Sanskritized than the previous ones: the importance which is accorded to hygiene, clothing and education are some of the important factors of this change, but there is more to it than that, since the young people also defend certain moral values in their elders' presence and are, for example, the first to denounce, and even repress, the 'flighty' sexual behaviour of certain girls. Young people are also more 'conscious' about untouchable rights, even if their mobilization is still not very effective. We shall perhaps witness more fundamental changes in the next decade, but for the moment the Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam seem to me to be only slightly Sanskritized and the whole analysis of their religious beliefs reinforces this feeling: the great Brahmanic deities have not yet made their appearance in village worship.

We have also seen that the villagers are not very militant about the question of untouchability. The Christians are even completely insensitive to the question which thus shows the limitation of social changes. None the less, it is necessary to underline here that the suppression of the Chettiar procession, related in Chapter Two, indicates that such changes have taken place despite everything, especially among the young people. Discriminations against the untouchables are accepted with greater and greater difficulty, even if there is still no developed strategy to put an end to them.

The process which Srinivas called *'Westernization'* also seems limited to me. The influence of Western culture on the Paraiyars is limited to a few aspects of material culture, like wearing a shirt, among the men, the habit of drinking tea and coffee in tea shops, the cinema, of course, etc. We have just seen that the idea of untouchability has been strongly undermined, but one cannot yet speak of a veritable revolution in this domain. The traditional institutions have in general shown remarkable stability, and they have often been able to resist or adapt to the rare technological innovations which have influenced the village.

Finally, there is a third difficulty which results from fieldwork. Can one consider a village to be an isolable entity? The idea of the self-sufficiency of the Indian village seems today to have been seriously put in question (see, for example, Pouchepadass 1980), and does not apply anyway to Valghira Manickam, which is centred on the outside by its very nature. The analysis of the village economy and also the inter-caste relationships took us outside the borders of the village. Hence the village does not constitute an independent entity, but nothing can stop us from studying its internal mechanisms, as we have done. As Marriott (1955: 191) underlined, Indian villages can be considered as sub-systems within a general system, and the latter cannot even be understood without reference to the 'hundreds of thousands of small communities'. The caste system thus helps in understanding the relationships within the village, but inversely the analysis of a village can allow us to refine upon our knowledge of Indian society.

At the beginning of this book, I underlined the almost complete absence of information concerning the social organization of the Christians of South India. We can now say that the differences between Hindus and Christians are minor. There is no real Christian community, or at any rate, the untouchables are excluded from it. It is possible that other studies will discover that the high castes show a feeling of belonging to a Catholic community, but such is not the case of the Paraiyars. The Christian Paraiyars are a sort of sub-caste of the Paraiyars and their conversion has clearly not changed their status considerably. The most striking difference between Hindus and Christians is of recent origin: since the Indian Constitution does not recognize the untouchability of Christians, the latter are excluded from militant organizations and cannot benefit from the various legal

advantages which are offered to the untouchables (see Sharma 1975). It is perhaps because of this that the Christians of Valghira Manickam are more attached to the traditional professions and remain economically weak. It is thus something of a paradox to note that the Christians are clearly more 'traditionalist' than the Hindus, who have remained faithful to their ancestral beliefs. The former ideas, according to which the Hindus demonstrate a fatalism which hinders them from taking the road to economic development, are not brought out at Valghira Manickam where, on the contrary, it is the Hindus who appear as more 'enterprising' than the Christians. Rao (1972) in fact pointed out that Hinduism also puts stress on material success. A study made by Houtart has shown, for example, that, in Kerala, 17.3 per cent of the Latin Catholics thought that providence was the best way for improving their status, while only 9.9 per cent of the Hindus expressed a similar opinion (Houtart & Lemercinier 1979).

Following their exclusion from the Scheduled castes, the Christians are also less activist, less concerned with the eradication of untouchability or with solidarity with untouchables who have fallen victim to cruelty. The religious difference between Hindus and Christians is not as deep as it seems at first sight. For both, religion is pragmatic. The Christians only go to church for a few ceremonies. They have maintained a fair amount of traditional beliefs; in the same fashion, the Hindus have easily come to terms with the cult of the Virgin Mary who is the dominant figure in the religious life of the Christians.

Finally, all academic considerations put aside, I hope to have been able to give an account of the village life. The anthropologist's experience is also a human experience, the fruit of the relationship between a man and a community. Behind the kinship rules, religious beliefs, the diagrams and tables, the rites and the structures, I hope that the reader will have seen a people who live and sometimes suffer. It is deliberately that the wretchedness of the Paraiyars' lives has been to some extent ignored, since the Harijans are not simply an economically underprivileged people. They also have beliefs and institutions, pastimes and games, joys and sorrows. Numerous economic studies have demonstrated, with figures to back them up, the amplitude of Indian poverty. The Paraiyars of Valghira Manickam are inevitably to be classed among the poorest people in India, but it was necessary to demonstrate the complexity and sometimes the wealth of their culture.

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